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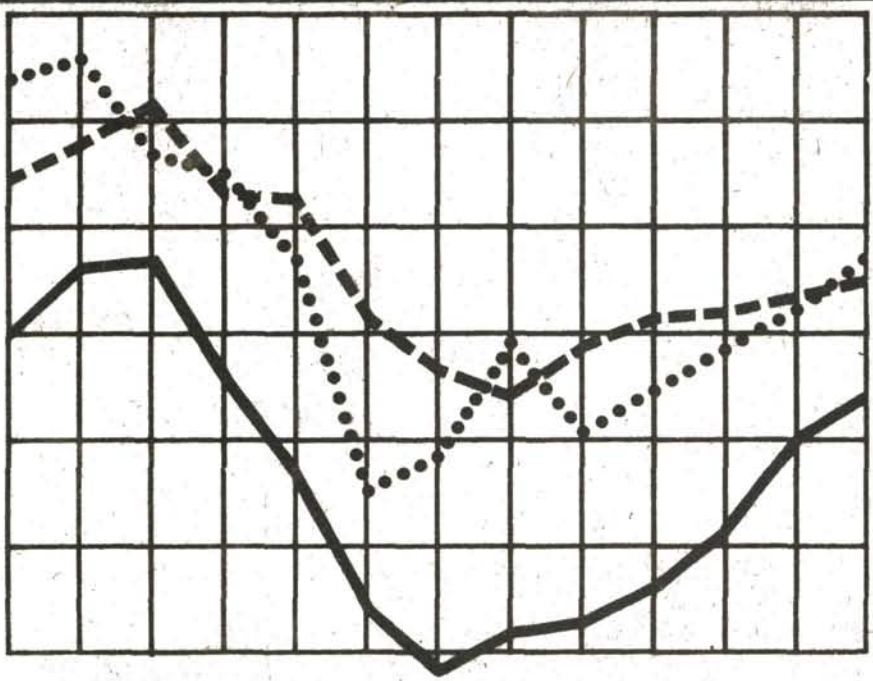
The Editors
WAR IN NICARAGUA

John A. Coleman
POPE IN LOWLANDS

$1.25

JUNE 21, 1985



DEBATING THE ECONOMICS PASTORAL

R. BRUCE DOUGLASS
NANCY S. BARRETT

CHARTING A COURSE

FROM VATICAN II TO THE SYNOD:
A NEW SERIES

GREGORY BAUM ON "AFTER LIBERAL OPTIMISM, WHAT?"

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Correspondence

Victory & life

Baltimore, Md.

To the Editors: All three essays in your Resurrection issue [April 5] offered complementary insights into the important historical realities of this biblical event. The titles bespeak the importance of the victory of life over death. While reading them my mind shifted to the recent death of one of America's best theologians, William Stringfellow. Stringfellow was a biblical person to the core. A short time before his death, he said, "I've been trying to live as a biblical person and understand the nation and the world in a biblical way." I highly recommend Stringfellow's works for anyone trying to live a life as a biblical person.

GENE ROMAN

Correcting errors

Andrews Air Force Base, D.C.

To the Editors: Mr. Robert O. Richardson's comments ["A Wrenching Solution," April 5] are very misleading to the American public and do a great disservice to the American military profession as well as American industry. I believe that the American public has a right to hear the other side of the story and a more complete picture of military spending rather than the few rather isolated examples which Richardson chose to illuminate. Some of the examples of wasteful procurement which he gave were honest mistakes by procurement officials, but others were a gross misstatement of the facts and not wasteful at all.

For instance, he mentioned that diodes generally available for 4¢ were fetching $110 in the Pentagon marketplace. This was, in fact, a diode which was ordered incorrectly by a procurement official for $110. That same year, the Defense Department bought 122,429 diodes for 4¢ and did receive a refund for the diode which was overpriced. Taking this example to show how a poor person heading a family of four could make a credible livelihood is facetious at best, and although perhaps well-intentioned, is exaggerating the condition.

In another of his examples, that of the Allen wrench for which he says the Air Force was willing to pay $9,609 before a Senate Committee made such a fuss in public, I should also like to set the record straight. The Allen wrench was, in fact, never bought by the Air Force nor was the Air Force ever willing to pay $9,609 for such a wrench. The gross overcharging in this case was identified by a Department of Defense auditor in the normal course of auditing the contractor's proposal. The Air Force official responsible for this procurement was in the process of finding an alternate means of procurement, obviously less expensive and more reasonable, when the matter was sensationalized by the press and certain congressmen to make it appear as though this was a general condition in Air Force procurement, which it certainly was not. All of the credit for uncovering the problem was given to the media and to the Congress when, in fact, it was the same military procurement system which he maligned which uncovered and corrected the problem.

I will not try to mislead you or the readers by saying that there are not mistakes made in the military procurement system which makes more than 15 million purchases a year -- there are errors made but, hopefully, these mistakes are on the lower dollar items, which do not rightfully receive as much attention as the larger, more expensive purchases. We are doing a much better job as a result of the media attention which has been brought to our system. In the last year, we have broken out over 100,000 items from prime contractors for competition or for direct buys from the actual manufacturer. We estimate that by these break outs, we avoided almost $1.2 billion dollars during the last fiscal year. Where we have identified overpricing, we have sought and received refunds from contractors totaling over $2.9 million. We are working hard to retain the faith and trust of the American people and we feel that the military should be given a fair hearing in the media. The system does not deserve the misstated treatment of Mr. Richardson's article.

If he still believes that the language and the system to procure 15 million items a year is no more complex than scoring a perfect bowling game or calculating the return on a Quinella, I invite him to come and help us devise a better system. It is very simple to sit on the sidelines and be the critic when one has not played in the game. To paraphrase George Bernard Shaw, "Those who can — do, those who can't — teach, and those who can't do either are the critics."

CHARLES P. WINTERS
Brigadier General, USAF

The author replies

Ever since Pentagon officials tried to keep A. Ernest Fitzgerald from testifying to a committee of Congress on $2 billion C-5A cost overruns and then punished him for doing his job, I've thought that Americans deserve "a more complete picture of military spending" than they usually get. Even now, when the Pentagon is publicizing its efforts to reform, I would welcome more information: Why would a defense contractor try to collect $9,609 for an Allen wrench unless he thought he had a good chance to do so? Is the 4¢/$110 diode really such a rare instance? Did the refund cover the whole overcharge?

A recent Pentagon press release shows a smiling Defense Secretary accepting what he calls a "substantial refund" from Gould, Inc. Gould, Navy auditors estimate, overcharged as much as $729,000 for a 421-piece repair kit for which the Navy paid $847,000. The

(Continued on page 383)

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SHOULD WE GO TO WAR WITH NICARAGUA?

NEVER MIND that for several years we have been at war with Nicaragua. This fact has been conveniently obscured, if by no means hidden, by the denials oozed from the White House while a plan to train a 500-man guerrilla force for interdicting weapons going from Nicaragua to El Salvador swiftly blossomed into the care and feeding of a full-fledged *contra* army 15,000-strong. Once Congress stopped playing along — prodded by embarrassments like the mining of Nicaraguan harbors and the revelation of a CIA-sponsored lesson book in assassination and terrorism — the administration increasingly shed its own obfuscations and uncertainties. Talk of interdicting arms faded; talk of "freedom fighters" and making the Sandinistas cry "Uncle!" increased. When Congress first balked at a new round of *contra* funding, Secretary of State Shultz promptly hinted that the administration might have to commit U.S. troops to combat in the region. A lengthy, two-part analysis in the *New York Times* (June 4-5) reports that the possibility of direct U.S. military intervention in Nicaragua "has become a matter of open discussion" in government circles and the view that such intervention would be relatively easy militarily, if not politically, "seems to have gained wide acceptance within the administration." In short, the administration is now putting the proposition bluntly to Congress and to the American people: preferably by proxy but if need be by U.S. troops, we *should* go to war with Sandinista-led Nicaragua. What the administration is not saying — at least not clearly — is why.

And Congress? In an extraordinary display of muddle-headedness, it seems to be replying, "Why not?" War is evidently a matter of some casualness, to be determined by episodes of the weightiness of President Ortega's "embarrassing" visit to Moscow. One would think that if there were reasons to justify the bloodshed and destruction of war these would be apparent whether or not the head of Nicaragua's government, like the head of Italy's government or the head of India's government, openly consulted with the Kremlin. Nor does the charade about "humanitarian" aid to the *contras* provide any excuse for not looking at those reasons. The rationale for backing our proxies today will be the rationale for sending U.S. forces tomorrow.

That rationale has two main components, emphasized differently by various administration officials and supporters, and sometimes juggled quickly enough to impress the public and hamper scrutiny. The first component is *security*. The Sandinistas are undeniably pro-Soviet; however much U.S. policy has cemented this orientation, it was evidently their own choice from the start. But swollen as their military capacity is — both as a consequence of their own revolutionary vision and as a realistic response to U.S. measures — it poses no genuine threat to American security. The argument then becomes that this nation of less than three million people is a *latent* danger — a potential Soviet base threatening Gulf of Mexico supply lines to Europe — as well as a base of subversion and a destabilizing factor in

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Central America. Does such a latent danger justify U.S. intervention? The principle of non-intervention in international affairs may not be absolute, but to amend it to justify military measures against all sorts of *latent* dangers is to grant powerful states the privilege of exercising vetos over the makeup of any government within their reach.

The conclusion to be drawn from the potential threat of a pro-Soviet Nicaragua is that Washington should negotiate a *modus vivendi*. The outlines of such an agreement have been clear for some time. They involve bans on certain kinds of weaponry as well as Soviet ports. They require guarantees for Nicaragua's neighbors. They may limit support to fellow revolutionaries. Absent the complicating factor of a U.S.-sponsored insurgency, drawing these lines — and enforcing them — is not an insurmountable problem. Enforcement would best be accomplished by regional or international authority. But at the outside it could revert to the U.S., whose forces — at an unknown cost to Honduran political development — are already thoroughly implanted in the region.

Nicaragua's leaders have no doubt created numerous obstacles to reaching such an understanding. But the record shows that, White House claims to the contrary, the U.S. has never tried to negotiate a reasonable *modus vivendi* in a straightforward and consistent fashion. Washington has repeatedly shifted or upped its demands, finally circling around to the insistence that the Sandinistas alter their internal regime and surrender their decisive power. The latent danger will be there as long as the Sandinistas are. Not surprisingly, the Sandinistas are loath to agree. Does that justify war?

The second component of the rationale for war is *democracy*. Certainly, evocations of "freedom fighters" play better with the public than calculations of security, especially since the latter appear far-fetched to many Americans. But no doubt the appeal to democracy has a real moral force within the administration and to liberals and centrists as well. And it should. It is a large step, however, from backing democracy to funding the *contras* or planning a U.S. invasion.

This is not the place for a full-scale appraisal of the Sandinista regime. Nicaragua, *pace* the president, is *not* "a totalitarian dungeon." Nor is it, *pace* some of its supporters, the last, best hope of the poor and oppressed. Its leaders, insofar as they have a guiding philosophy, appear captives of an outlook that scorns "bourgeois" liberties and has a worldwide track record of economic failure. Yet five years into Sandinista rule, independent centers of power, undisguised manifestations of political opposition, checks on human rights abuses, and even rudiments of parliamentary election and debate remain more real in Nicaragua than in numerous other third-world regimes, including some with close U.S. ties. Part of the tangled debate centers on how much of this moderation has survived because of American pressure and how much despite it.

But objections to a war for democracy in Nicaragua do not end with inevitably ambiguous conclusions about the ultimate drift of the Sandinistas. The men who control the guns in the anti-Sandinista insurgency are men whose past careers as Somoza henchmen abundantly disqualify them as standard bearers of democracy. That thousands of disaffected *campesinos* and a number of honorable democratic politicians have felt compelled to join with such dubious leadership reveals the extent of Sandinista failure. But there are no reasonable grounds for belief that a *contra* military victory would initiate anything but another round of dictatorship, bloodbath, and prolonged insurgency. A more subtle case for supporting the *contras* tacitly grants this point but pleads strengthening them only in order to force the Sandinistas into negotiating a greater degree of political openness. It is a case altogether too subtle — and altogether too trusting of the forces shaping American policy. These forces have favored right-wing "authoritarians" whenever public opinion did not protest; consistently reject negotiated compromises; and even today are sabotaging the one arguable opening toward a balance between hard-line left and death-squad right that has emerged in Duarte's El Salvador. If democracy could spring from the barrels of U.S. guns, Central America would have been a paragon of democracy long ago.

The debate about U.S. policy toward Nicaragua is scandalously unserious, as though war were only political campaigning carried on by other means. War in Central America is not the necessary, not even the plausible, means to assuring security and democracy in the hemisphere. For a tradition in which war can only be a last resort, justified by stringent criteria, current developments demand an unmistakable protest.

In keeping with *Commonweal*'s usual summer schedule, only one issue will be published each month during June, July, and August. The next issue will be dated July 12.

AFFIRMATIVE FACTS

One need only be able to feel the national pulse to know that affirmative action and the problems it seeks to correct are deeply disturbing. While there is virtually universal agreement on the underlying goal — extending equal job opportunity to all Americans — there are understandable degrees of hesitation about a policy that apportions jobs to people on the basis of numbers or classifies individuals on the basis of race and gender. Too often the medicine seems worse than the disease.

For many years, however, a less complex argument has been bandied about: not only were the means employed by affirmative action controversial and uncomfortable, but tangible results were negligible, or not worth the expenditures and psychological torment. Things have changed; affirmative action appears to be working.

The present debate provoked by William Bradford Reynolds, the U.S. justice department's assistant attorney general for civil rights, is particularly troublesome. Mr. Reynolds has stirred up relatively tranquil waters and picked a fight (in Indiana) by urging fifty-six cities, counties, and states to abolish their legal consent decrees establishing numerical goals for hiring. Oddly, his behavior concerns reversing more

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than the legality of quotas; it violates the Reagan administration's favorite dictum: big government off the backs of local government. Most important, Mr. Reynolds's rebuffs come smack in the midst of documented gains for minorities according to "A Decade of New Opportunity," a report by the Potomac Institute, an independent research body.

According to the report, the picture is brighter now than it was. When the Institute issued its report for 1960-1970, voluntary efforts to improve equal opportunity for minorities, even when accompanied by technical assistance, were shown to be ineffective. In one case, covering ninety-one companies who volunteered to hire minorities, the gains "remained stubbornly small": average black employment rose only one-tenth of a percent from (5.0 in 1961 to 5.1 in 1963). The creeping pace of voluntarism was clearly insufficient.

A rush of adrenalin came when, in a unanimous Supreme Court ruling, *Griggs v. Duke Power Company,* discrimination was broadened beyond "intent to discriminate" to include an analysis of actual employment practices, so-called "built-in headwinds" that blew against whole minority groups.

Now, the Potomac Institute concludes that from the 1970-1980 data change has been "significant" and much of it "due to affirmative action." "Appropriate changes in personnel practices appear to have been made, at least among the larger employers of the nation."

This progress was all the more impressive since it was achieved despite the harsh economic climate beginning in the mid-1970s; despite the dramatic increase in female heads of households; despite the rising rate of unemployment and its disproportionate impact on young black males; and despite the persistent disparity in income between males and females at all levels. In the face of all such factors, the Institute concludes that "at the end of the decade both minorities and women had greater employment in higher-paid jobs, where they had traditionally been underrepresented, than at the beginning." "A good start," they surmise.

Further data topple the old argument that affirmative action just doesn't work. In just six years federal government contractors covered by affirmative action requirements surpassed noncontractors in proportions of minorities employed in five of nine categories. In construction, graduates from apprenticeships (which virtually excluded minorities before affirmative action) rose for all minority groups: from 1.4 percent to 9.5 percent for blacks in nine years. No job discrimination for graduates could be documented.

There is more. As Mr. Reynolds has found by brushing against police and fire department employers, the results of affirmative action programs attract supporters. One survey reported by the Institute includes contractors among the fans who find numerical goals to be "an essential management tool." Pardon us, Mr. Reynolds, while we bother you with the facts.

Of several minds: *John Garvey*

DEEPER THAN EMOTIONS

THE GUIDING ROLE OF DOGMA

THE CONNECTION, or lack of one, between our emotions and what we finally are is a mystery which is not on our minds enough. We assume the primary importance of the emotional life to an extent which probably would have seemed strange to our ancestors. (This may be a legacy of Romanticism, which could almost be defined as the range of emotional possibility which stretches from *Madame Bovary* to *Dracula*.) We think of the emotions as central to what makes life important. Feeling good about what we are and what we are doing is absolutely important to our consideration of such questions as whether we will continue a marriage or friendship or a line of work. If circumstances, economic or cultural, force us to continue living or working against the emotional grain, we feel that something monumentally unfair is at work in our lives. A strong emotion about a relationship validates it; one which is willed, or which doesn't seem to come from the heart in some way apparent to us, strikes us as false, hypocritical, and somewhat less real.

Emotions do matter and are real, often important, parts of our life. But they are not necessarily guides to how we should live, nor are some of the most overwhelming and apparently good emotions connected with goodness. Deep feelings of love may finally have nothing to do with love in any important sense. Strong emotions may prove no more than indigestion or ulcer symptoms do about the real spiritual state or the virtue of the person who experiences them. Nazis and followers of Pol Pot and members of the Klan all dandle children on their knees. No doubt they have the same visceral feelings about their children that I have about mine: they would die to keep them alive. We know that prominent Nazis were profoundly moved by Bach's music, and it would be a kind of fear, an unreasonable self-protection, for me to assume that what moved them was not the same glory and loveliness that moves me. Torturers no doubt love their wives and children deeply, are loyal to their friends, mourn their dead.

It would be nice if there were some obvious connection between strong affection, powerful emotion, the feelings we believe should make us better people, and the way we really are. It would be nice because it would allow us to believe what we seem to need to believe: that our lives are whole and connected at some level, that we are one sort of being.

But that isn't the case. Given the fact that Nazis can be moved by the emotions of love and loyalty, given the appreciation of beauty which can be found in the soul of the torturer, why is it that this

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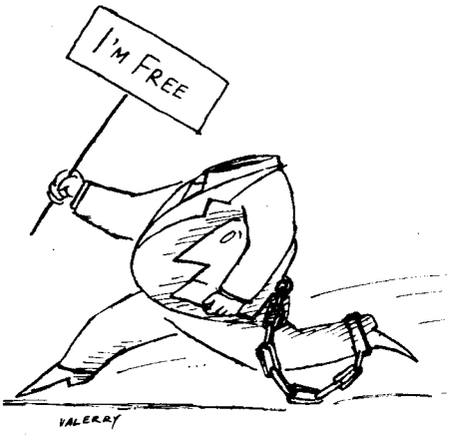
profound feeling does not translate into a feeling about all human beings? How could the love of one parent for his or her child not lead to compassion for all other parents and their children? How could a Mengele happen in the same race which produced a St. Francis of Assisi?

Our age doesn't offer us a good vocabulary for dealing with these things. (This shouldn't lead us to think that other ages were good at them; the fact is that in the ages when officially sanctioned Christianity reigned, it was all right to torment criminals before their death; and of course it was considered permissible to mistreat Jews and schismatics and heretics.) We are tempted to say, "Those people (Nazis, Argentinian torturers, Soviet camp guards, whoever) may feel strongly, but they feel strongly about the wrong things; or they fail to draw the right lessons from what they feel." This presents a new problem: it leads us to the realm of the objective; it leads us to something that can only be called dogma, or orthodoxy.

How does someone come to the "right way" of feeling about something? How is one to know what conclusions are proper? These things don't come from feelings alone; something must be brought to the feeling, some way of reading the feeling which gives us the language we need to say what it means.

The language, for better or worse, comes to us from culture, or religion, or soci[illegible] but it does come to us from outside. . . not innate. Our fascination with wolf-children, with those who are raised outside of human community, is a reflection of our desire to see what it would be like to see human emotion and response in the raw. Those children will never become Nazis. They lack the language, and therefore presumably the capacity. They will also never become Wallenbergs, or Gandhis, or St. Francises, Bachs, Dostoyevskys, or even ordinarily affectionate and loyal friends or good parents. Maybe in our despair we find ourselves wishing sometimes that this level were as far as humanity could go, the speechless level which would make a murder a local and limited affair, something done only because we have to eat. We have a reasonable, but wrong, fear of



the extremes of human freedom. It is wrong to wish to be less than we are capable of being, even if our century makes the wish understandable.

What does this have to do with dogma and orthodoxy? The words have a largely negative reading these days; they suggest a rigidity and closed-mindedness which no one finds sympathetic. Dogma and orthodoxy can be like that, of course. This rigidity exists, however, not only at Jerry Falwell's level or in the claims of the most conservative bishops. It can be found in ACLU members and the most liberal Unitarians. What tends to get called "dogmatic" or "orthodox" is unpopular dogma and orthodoxy. (For example, to be pro-choice is not dogmatic; to be pro-life is. It doesn't matter that the same vehemence and closed-mindedness can be brought to either side of the debate.) But dogma means something richer than this.

We can't avoid assuming some things about values and meaning. We assume, for instance, that it is right to pursue justice, even if doing so leads to great personal inconvenience, perhaps to death. There can be no proof for this assumption; it is an *a priori* belief, and one of the few which seems to be shared by a great many otherwise different groups. We may not agree about what justice means, but we do agree that, whatever it means, it is worth risk and inconvenience. We may or may not feel passionate about it, but beyond feeling we understand the need to work for it, even if the work is dogged and without passion. (This could be some of what appeals to us obscurely in the grey atmosphere which surrounds the detective novels of Simenon, Le Carré's thrillers, and it may be why we respond to the stubborn decency of some of Dick Francis's protagonists.) This belief serves as a form of secular dogma: it directs and leads our feelings and emotions, and can transform them.

It would be ideal, our aesthetic sense tells us, if feelings and dogma came together in a case like this and strong emotions meshed with decent belief, forming a whole. But life is frequently not so accommodating. The husband who is faithful to a wife who is terribly ill, acts of courage, friendship in difficult times, all of these can involve going against the emotional grain for the sake of something which we know—even if our knowing is often dim, something truly dark—to be more important than emotion.

Emotions lie at the surface of a perception which is deeper than emotion can ever be. Just as the knowledge of joy is deeper than the emotion of happiness, there are forms of love which are much deeper than the emotions we ordinarily associate with love. It shouldn't be thought that true love involves a steely determination and no feeling at all, although there may be times when it does involve this. Finally, it is a perception, a vision, and an understanding. Like so many other experiences, it may not be immediately and fully available to us; it might involve turning around years after the fact, seeing clearly what love has meant in a particular situation for the first time.

At the beginning of the recitation of the Creed in the Orthodox liturgy the priest says, "Let us love one another, so that with one mind we may confess the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the Trinity, one in essence and undivided." Love must be present, informing our confession of faith, for our confession to be true; and we will not be able to see what the love we are called to show one another means, unless we see it dogmatically, in the richest sense of the word. It is a dogma—the Incarnation—that tells Christians what love finally means: a freely accepted self-emptying which allows the Giver of life, who already fills the universe, to become manifest.

JOHN GARVEY

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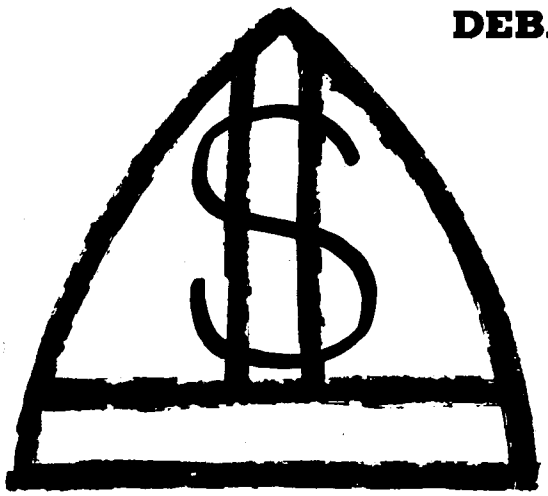

At the heart of the letter

R. BRUCE DOUGLASS

WE ARE NOW SIX months into the debate elicited by the U.S. Catholic bishops' letter on the U.S. economy. To date, it has not been particularly edifying. With very few exceptions, those who have chosen to comment on the bishops' first draft have failed to come to grips with the central substance of the argument the bishops seek to make.

The problem is the peculiar character of that argument in the context of our public life. Even though the letter addresses issues which are the staples of public life in a modern society, it does so in a quite distinctive way. It seeks, specifically, to articulate a *theological* perspective on economics — i.e., to make sense of the meaning and purpose of economic activity in the light of the church's most basic teaching. It calls, in turn, for a theological response. In so far as the letter embraces particular economic analyses, it must also be evaluated on those terms, to be sure. But fundamentally it is a theological statement, and needs to be judged accordingly.

Few, however, feel themselves qualified to make such a judgment. We are, for the most part, a theologically illiterate society, and most of our pundits lack even a rudimentary acquaintance with the logic of theological argument. The prejudice is widespread, moreover, that claims made in a theological vein are just "packaging" for conclusions derived from other sources. Predictably, the strategy employed by most commentators has been to ignore the theological part of the argument, and to focus almost exclusively on the policy recommendations. The letter has tended to be treated, therefore, as though it were just another policy pronouncement by the AFL-CIO or the Democratic National Committee; and the discussion has proceeded as though the only relevant standard of evaluation were the adequacy of the policy proposals the letter makes considered in economic terms.

Partisan politics has played a definite role, too, in the reception the letter has received. The draft sharply challenges the justice of the American economy precisely when the administration is trying desperately to recover a sense of moral superiority for American institutions. Given this provocation, it was probably inevitable that the press would reduce the whole argument to an attack on Reaganomics. But once that impression was created, it was promptly seized on by practically every conservative critic as a means of dismissing the letter. What better way to avoid the challenge of a serious argument than to trivialize the claims it makes as the product of the discovery that "God subscribes to the liberal agenda" (George F. Will)?

Whatever the motives inspiring such dismissal by innuendo, however, it needs to be stoutly resisted. Regardless of what one finally concludes about the merits of the draft, and solely on grounds of the importance of the general issue it raises, it deserves better treatment. But what are the merits of the argument the letter makes — understood on its own terms? Does it articulate a theology of economic life that is what the church should be expected to say in this particular phase of American history? The answer I propose is in principle affirmative, but with certain qualifications.

In making this judgment, I presuppose a particular way of interpreting the character of the draft's argument. It represents, I would submit, an updating of the traditional Catholic common good teaching, one relying more directly on Scripture than Catholic social thought generally has in the past. This attempt to give Scripture a larger role leads to some of my reservations. Nonetheless, the innovations by no means override the primacy of the traditional themes, which provide the essential core of the theological claims the letter seeks to make.

What specific claims reflect the common good tradition? Three are of particular importance:

First, economic activity is to be understood as a means to serve higher purposes and not as an end in itself. Economic institutions are not to be evaluated solely in terms of economists' prime consideration, that is, productive efficiency, but also by the contribution which they do (or do not) make to the well-rounded development of the human person.

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The clear implication is that economic activity must be put in its place. It is important to human welfare, to be sure, as the letter clearly acknowledges, but it is not *ultimately* important. A well-ordered society is one in which economic considerations are not in fact the be-all and the end-all of human existence. Where economic efficiency conflicts with the pursuit of other "higher" goods, efficiency can and should be compromised.

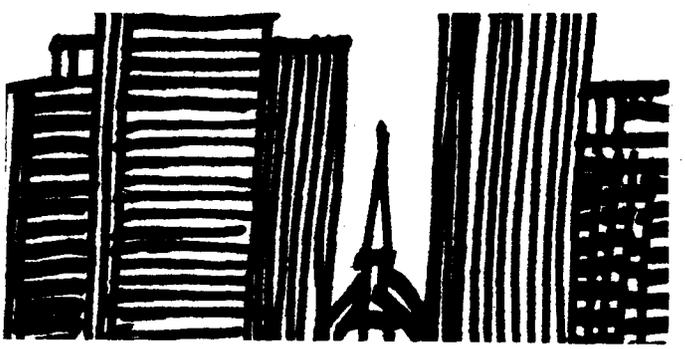
Second, the proper way for human beings to relate to one another is in *community* — as self-conscious collaborators in enterprises which they know to be of mutual interest and concern. We are to think of the economic means at our disposal as common resources with which we have been entrusted in order to seek the good of the whole community. The document stops short of carrying this idea to the point of advocating collective ownership of the means of production. On the contrary, it affirms, in a very traditional manner, the utility and even virtue of private property. But at the same time it insists on the necessity of viewing the property with which individuals (and other private economic actors) find themselves entrusted as just that, a trust, given to them to serve the common good and not just private interest. Those who dispose of the means of production on behalf of the community, says the letter, striking a very biblical theme, are to view themselves as *stewards* of the earth, responsible to God and the community alike for its proper use.

Third, the letter insists, again in traditional fashion, that the common good should be consciously willed and pursued in the design of social institutions and public policy. There is not a hint here of confidence in an Invisible Hand to effect the realization of the common good out of individuals' seeking their own interest, independent of the wider good of the community. The common good, unmistakably, is to be thought of as a good which must be deliberately sought, and the implication is that in the absence of such a conscious pursuit, it will not in fact be achieved — or at least not be achieved very well. This implies, in turn, a major role for government. As the text correctly observes, Catholic social thought has long held that one of government's prime tasks is "the coordination and regulation of diverse groups in society in a way that leads to the common good and the protection of basic rights." But the principle is not confined to government. Not just government, but industry, the schools, the arts, the family, etc., should all be structured and maintained so as to enable people to live together in such a way that they promote the full well-being of one another.

MORE — MUCH MORE — could be said. But I trust that even these brief summary remarks convey a sense of what is involved in thinking in these terms. The question, then, is whether those responsible for drafting the letter have chosen wisely in continuing to uphold, albeit in an adapted form, this essentially traditional way of thinking. My answer is yes, but to explain why, I need to comment briefly on the challenge confronting anyone undertaking the project the letter entails. The basic, underlying issue in any such attempt to make theological sense of economics consonant with the distinctive theological claims of Christianity is to reconcile the competing claims of godly living and economic efficiency. Unlike some of the other great world religions, Christianity, as an extension of Judaism, affirms the goodness of human efforts to take control of the earth for human well-being. It treats the goods and services which human beings acquire through their labor to improve their lot as part of God's providence. There are different emphases among the many different Christian communions in this regard, but in principle Christian teaching has consistently been supportive of efforts to improve the material conditions under which we live. On the other hand, it has also long been a part of Christian thought to recognize that the true fulfillment of human beings lies beyond material well-being.

The question for most of the history of Christian thought has been how to do justice simultaneously to both of these concerns. Economic efficiency has a certain theological dignity in Christian thought, but so, too, does living one's life in accord with the demands of piety and virtue (however defined). The common good tradition developed, in its economic aspect at least, precisely to meet this demand, and it prevailed as long as it did because it was reasonably successful in this regard. It was not, however, geared to economic *growth*. That ultimately proved to be its undoing. For with the stirring of "economic man" in the later Middle Ages, and with the increasing awareness of the possibility of steady multiplication of capital which was provided by the instrument of the free market, the way of thinking embodied in the common good tradition was increasingly perceived as restrictive and even reactionary. If only, said the early apologists for capitalism, we could be free of the restraints on economic activity imposed by church and state in the name of the common good, a new dynamism could be introduced into our economic life that will enhance in unparalleled ways the material benefits available to us.

Subsequent history has shown this claim to be very well founded. A dynamism *has* been introduced into the conduct of economic activity in the West that has resulted in an enormous — and relatively steady — advance in the standard of living. We live better in a material sense today — *far* better — than our predecessors in the age of Aquinas because of the late medieval and early modern revolt against the common good tradition. Much of what this entails must be considered progress by any reasonable standard. The fact that people in the industrialized world have access today to the sort of medical



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care that they do, or that food is available in plentiful and steady supply, or that we can afford to educate (for years at a time!) almost every citizen — all of this enhances human well-being in ways that are both profoundly important and beyond dispute. The question, in turn, which naturally has arisen as the church has sought to adapt itself to the modern world, is whether it should abandon the common good tradition in favor of some modern "progressive" alternative. Especially does this arise with respect to economic liberalism, the primary — though by no means the sole — source of the new dynamism which entered the world in the seventeenth century.

The argument has never made much headway. Instead, the predominant tendency, expressed above all in the social encyclicals, has been to adapt the common good tradition to the new conditions presented by the modern world.

Why this resistance to adopting a new position? In one way or another, all of the modern alternatives to the common good tradition entail claims that are theologically and philosophically unacceptable. Liberalism, for example, does indeed provide a dynamism in the economic sphere that is extraordinary, especially if certain social conditions can be assumed, and it is conducive to liberty in a manner that has few parallels. But at what price? It unleashed a competitive spirit that can easily militate against both social justice and community. Furthermore, it has a well-established tendency to make the pursuit of economic goods the be-all and end-all of existence.

Economic liberalism fails, therefore, the crucial test. It does not in fact balance the twin concerns of spiritual and moral well-being, on the one hand, and of material prosperity on the other. It is precisely what its early apologists said it was: a defiant assertion of the primacy of this-worldly, materialistic concerns over the more complex — and balanced — view of the common good tradition. No amount of celebration of the value of freedom will gainsay this fact. The same criticism applies, although in a very different way, to the major competitor to liberalism. While socialism meets directly some of the concerns raised in the Catholic critique of liberalism, socialists ultimately tend to share with liberals the characteristic "economism" of the modern world. They too, are inclined to treat economic productivity and related matters as the heart of the human good, and to treat many of the moral and spiritual issues of concern to Catholics with either contempt or indifference.

The foundation, therefore, on which the bishops' letter rests is a solid one. The common good tradition can be successfully adapted, I am convinced, to the conditions we now face, without at the same time simply adopting wholesale the characteristic biases (and illusions) of modernity. The very fact that the tradition is not altogether consonant with the ideas and practices currently in vogue is what makes it so valuable. Comfortable as the way of life to which we are now accustomed may be in certain respects, there is, nonetheless, much in it that is not in the least theologically defensible, and any Christian theology of economics worth the name should make us sensitive to this in just the manner the bishops attempt to do.

TO AGREE with their foundation is not, however, to agree with every particular inference which the bishops draw. In several respects I find specific details of their argument unpersuasive:

● One of the more important characteristics of this letter, considered against the background of previous Catholic social teaching, is, as I mentioned, its reliance on Scripture. This is not merely a matter of form; it affects the substance of the argument as well. Those who are at all familiar with recent trends in Catholic theology will recognize immediately that this is not accidental. It derives from developments in the post-Vatican II era that are having a profound effect across virtually the whole range of the theological agenda. As a Protestant, I can only applaud in principle what this represents. It meets what has long been probably the most important theological criticism of Catholic social teaching by Protestants, and in the process it adds a vitally important dimension to Catholic theology that previously tended to be missing. Catholic thought is actually beginning to take on the character of the synthesis of reason and revelation that it has always claimed to be. Progress in method, however, does not automatically mean progress in the substance of the analysis and argument being advanced.

What the bishops propose is that justice above all is the biblical goal in ordering economic relations, and that this is intended in a very specific sense — care for the well-being of the least advantaged. Critics have alleged that what this actually reflects is the influence of modern philosophy and/or political ideology, such as the "difference principle" articulated in John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice*. I think they are wrong. The real source of these claims is just what the citations in the text suggest — recent scriptural studies, which have gone a long way to establish a solid foundation for this part of the letter's theological claims.

But what is scriptural may not necessarily be satisfactory for the purposes of moral and political philosophy. The great strength of Catholic social teaching in the past, which has always been the compensation for its tendency to give short shrift to Scripture, has been the stress on philosopical coherence. It is for this reason that Catholic social thought has had greater philosophical plausibility than Protestant, with the difference varying in direct proportion to the extent to which Protestant bibliolatry prevailed. Now, as Catholic teaching begins to incorporate themes derived from Scripture in a more direct and complete manner, the danger is that it will be afflicted with the very same tendency to sacrifice philosophical coherence for scriptural dogmatism.

The problem is not the insistence on justice as the standard by which social — and especially economic — institutions are to be judged. The problem lies with the notion that justice means, *tout court*, a concern for the well-being of the least advantaged. While there is very good biblical warrant for making this claim, I do question whether it can suffice as the sum and substance of the definition of justice in a document meant to encompass the *totality* of economic life in a society. A definition which is so narrowly focused on only one aspect

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of the problem is for this purpose inappropriate.

WHY DO I say narrowly focused? Certainly the fate of the "disadvantaged" is a very important part of the general question of who deserves to get what. But equally important are considerations like: Who should pay, and in what proportions, for benefits to the least advantaged? How much equality, and of what sort, is desired in the distribution of benefits among those who are *not* the least advantaged? To what degree is social mobility a part of social justice? And so on.

One can well imagine a society that devoted itself very seriously to the task of providing for the welfare of its least advantaged and yet fell short of justice in a more complete sense because of the way it dealt with these other issues. Indeed, one can imagine such a society being judged *unjust* because of the way the resulting costs were imposed on the rest of the population. Any philosophically coherent concept of distributive justice recognizes this many-sided character of the problem, and the need to take these aspects into account in an integrated way. To the extent that some biblical passages suggest otherwise, they are simply misleading. On this point in particular, Scripture needs what Catholic teaching has usually required — namely, philosophical refinement if not correction.

● I have already discussed the competing demands of piety and virtue, on the one hand, and economic efficiency, on the other. The strength of the common good tradition is that it represents a serious effort to balance both. But its modern critics would say, justifiably, that ultimately it still tends to sacrifice economic efficiency for religious concerns. But how can the required revisions be made without creating a new imbalance of the opposite sort? The present document is clearly meant to do this, but in my judgment, it does not really come to terms with the full seriousness and complexity of the problem. The authors are reluctant to acknowledge what may in fact be an unavoidable dilemma — that the prosperity to which we are now accustomed in the industrialized world (and the growth that is part of our expectations) may simply be incompatible with the notions of human fulfillment and virtuous living that are commonly assumed in Catholic moral philosophy and theology. This is not to say that economic activity, well-being, or growth are *per se* undesirable. The point is rather that the particular way in which they are defined and pursued in modern societies — capitalist and socialist alike — tends to be subversive of those qualities of mind and heart that we normally have in mind when we think of what human existence is supposed to be, theologically understood.

The document recognizes this tension but it never wrestles with the more fundamental issue it raises. It has the appearance of suggesting we can somehow have our cake and eat it too. The goal of reduced consumption is altogether appropriate here even more, perhaps, for theological than ethical reasons. It should probably be given even more emphasis. But it can hardly be reconciled with an ambitious set of employment goals — unless, of course, one is thinking of a fundamentally different sort of economy. My hunch is that lurking in the background of this letter is indeed a sense of an economy of the future which would be very different from what we know today in the industrially advanced societies. But this is not at all developed, and the result is to leave unexplored one of the most important challenges of the document.

● The final critical observation I want to raise concerns the role which is assigned to the state in the ordering of economic life. The present letter, fully in keeping with its tradition, assigns a considerable — though by no means all-encompassing — role to civil authorities in achieving the ends it prescribes. Much of the specific detail of the policy recommendations simply reiterates the social encyclicals and other Catholic pronouncements to adapt this tradition to the logic of the modern welfare state. But the desirability of the sort of role which the letter proposes for government is increasingly disputed.

The reasons for this new debate about the role of the state are multiple and complex. In part they have to do with objective political and economic problems which the welfare state has encountered in one country after another. But they also have to do with the effort of certain ideologues to impose a particular interpretation on these problems, one which will have the effect of discrediting the whole enterprise that the welfare state represents. The latter effort the bishops have chosen to ignore, with good reason in my judgment. Most of the claims that conservative and neoconservative critics are making about the significance of the current troubles of the welfare state are enormously exaggerated, and are not supported by anything like the argumentation and evidence adequate for them to have an enduring significance. They deserve to be dismissed without extended comment.

There *is*, nonetheless, a fiscal crisis of the welfare state, which is why issues of political economy are attracting so much attention these days. There *is* also a crisis of delivery of sorts, such that practitioners and analysts of social policy are much less confident now than they were a few decades ago that the intentions which typically lie behind governmental efforts to produce certain social results can, in fact, be fulfilled. Regardless of what one believes about the conservative interpretation of these problems, they are not at all simply figments of the conservative mind. They are real, and they are likely to endure.

We are now entering a new era in the discussion of the role of the state. The hallmark of this era will be the requirement that every proposal which entails a significant role for the state be accompanied by careful, self-critical analysis of its feasibility in relation to fiscal policy, on the one hand, and the actual delivery capabilities of public agencies, on the other.

The letter reflects little awareness of these new realities, which is one of the main reasons why it has been so easy to dismiss. The letter badly needs an infusion of sophistication about the complexities of social policy today. It needs a theory of the state which reflects the realities of the 1970s and '80s rather than those of the 1930s and '40s. We are living in a new time. The electorate senses it, so do politicians; and scholarly analysis is increasingly beginning to capture some of what the

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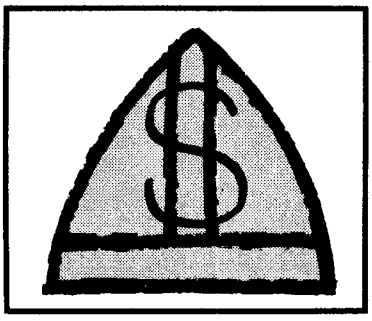
difference is. In this setting, the bishops can ill afford appearing as well-meaning dogmatists who just cannot bring themselves to give up outworn formulas. There is no good reason, in any case, why they need do so. The tradition of thought which they have chosen as the basis of their argument is probably better equipped to respond to these new realities than most of the alternatives.

The letter is hardly, therefore, the last word. Much work remains to be done, and some difficult issues have to be resolved if the bishops are truly to meet the challenge which they have posed for themselves. But already they have accomplished a great deal — far more, certainly, than most of their critics have acknowledged. Just to have raised the issue of the uneasy fit between Christian faith and the current American economy as clearly and forcefully as they have done is itself a signal achievement. Beyond this, they have gone a long way towards establishing that there is such a thing as a coherent contemporary Christian understanding of the meaning and purpose of economic life as well. They are on the right track, and one can only hope, as they go about responding to their critics in the next draft, that they will hold fast to what has been gained.



DEBATING THE ECONOMICS PASTORAL, II

The case for collaboration

NANCY S. BARRETT

PERHAPS the most controversial aspect of the bishops' pastoral letter, "Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy," has been its call for various levels of cooperation and collaboration to address and redress some of the structural problems we face. While some of the reaction to the suggestion that economic planning might be desirable within free-enterprise capitalism has been to misinterpret the intent of the bishops' message (they explicitly rule out endorsement of a highly-centralized form of planning), nevertheless, the bishops are proposing a departure from pure laissez-faire, market-oriented policies. They argue that market forces have not and will not solve many of the problems we face in today's economy, and that cooperation rather than competition should be sought as a means of restoring social justice.

In some sense, our social and political institutions and values have evolved much more rapidly than our economic institutions. We are committed socially and politically not only to equality of opportunity, but also to reasonably equitable distribution of outcomes. Yet our very economic system generates considerable inequalities in terms of living standards and material well-being, producing tensions between our political and social values on the one hand and glaring inequalities generated by our free markets on the other hand.

Another problem is the tendency for political interest groups to oppose the free play of market forces when such forces threaten to produce an adverse result. When these groups are successful in forestalling change, the consequence is a sort of "lemon capitalism" in which inefficient industries and firms are protected behind tariff walls, quotas, and price supports, and there is little, if any, incentive for cost-cutting or productivity improvements.

Of course the "invisible hand" of the market has the distinct advantage of precluding a huge bureaucratic apparatus. But the facts are that in our world, the not-so-invisible hands of a whole host of interest groups are lobbying, often successfully, for market interventions. When this process occurs willy-nilly, with no coordination, political clout rather than economic merit prevails. The question then becomes: Is there a role for national economic planning in a capitalist market economy, and would such a process improve upon the existing laissez-faire approach?

Practically all economists agree that markets are extremely efficient institutions for allocating scarce resources. And markets often are able to adjust to change quickly and costlessly. For instance, when the freeze in Florida ruined the orange crop, orange juice prices rose and people switched to less-costly breakfast drinks. Had we attempted to ration orange juice through a centrally-planned scheme, the result would undoubtedly have been a disaster.

On the other hand, there are also times when markets work less efficiently. Inequality, unemployment, excessive and counterproductive competition in international markets have been unacceptable by-products of a market system. Sometimes market outcomes have unacceptable distributional consequences. Take the rise in energy prices. Oil is not like orange juice — it is a larger part of people's budgets, and suitable

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substitutes for it are harder to find. There are usually always losers when strictly market forces are at work — from farmers who are hurt by falling food prices, to workers in heavy "smokestack" industries who are affected by the reallocation of domestic production to high-tech products embodying new skills and capital equipment.

When our political system attempts to offset these human costs, intervention is generally negative rather than positive — forestalling rather than accommodating change — producing lemon capitalism rather than enhancing productivity and the competitiveness of our industry. This conflict between the political demands of fairness and the response of markets to structural change is the most important single factor in our nation's extremely poor productivity performance over the past decade. Today per capita real income is lower than it was in 1977, despite the fact that our economy is growing rapidly. The question facing economists is not whether markets work, but rather whether we are in a time when market failures are so serious as to necessitate a different way of setting economic priorities and of guiding economic decision-making.

Some historical context may be constructive. The first major break with unbridled laissez-faire in this country came during the Depression of the 1930s. President Roosevelt's New Deal represented a massive effort by the federal govern-

POVERTY, 1965-1985
A CHALLENGE FOR THE BISHOPS

READ THESE quotations from two reports dealing with poverty among children, and see if you can put dates on them:

> (A) In our work-oriented society, those who cannot or do not work must expect to be poorer than those who do. Yet more than half of all poor families report that the head currently has a job. . . . Of the . . . children under age eighteen counted as poor, about [38 percent] were in the family of a man or woman who had a full-time job. . . .
>
> (B) Without a working parent, a child is almost sure to be poor. But having a working parent is no guarantee against poverty.
>
> In all, more than 2.5 million children with at least one parent who worked more than 2,000 hours a year . . . were poor. They represented . . . one-third of all poor children in married-couple families.

The first quotation comes from "Counting the Poor," Mollie Orshansky's now "classic" 1965 article proposing a way to establish the poverty line, profiling the poor as of 1963.

The second quotation comes from "Children in Poverty," a May 1985 report by the Library of Congress's Congressional Research Service and the bipartisan Congressional Budget Office. A profile of poor children as of 1983, this newest report is much fatter, and benefits both from the voluminous research that has been done on poverty in recent years and from the many sophisticated new techniques being developed for analyzing poverty data. But the similarities between the two periods — two decades apart — are almost eerie. Both in 1963 and in 1983:

- roughly the same proportion of poor families with children were headed by a full-time worker;
- families headed by a man who worked full-time, all year, ran virtually the same risk of still ending up poor (though the percentage of full-time workers who are poor has gone up by one-third just since 1978);
- economic expansion was shown to have limited value in lifting families with children out of poverty (even with sustained economic growth of 3 percent per year, it would take a decade or more simply to reduce poverty to its 1979 level); and,
- many more children would have been poor without social security or welfare.

It is not that nothing has happened in the years between the two reports; much has. In the decade from 1959-1969, the poverty rate for children was cut nearly in half; that represented significant progress. Between 1969 and 1979, the rate varied, but moved generally upward. Since 1979 there has been a sharp increase in poverty among children.

During those intervening years we've also learned a great deal more about poverty, American-style. Thanks to the "Panel Study of Income Dynamics" carried out by the University of Michigan, for example, it is now clear that persistent, long-term poverty is rare, the exception among the poor, not the rule, and that heavy dependence on welfare is even rarer. This held true even though the kind and value of available social welfare benefits changed frequently during the years since 1968 when the Panel Study began. Other studies carried out in the interim have dealt with such questions as whether women have babies to get welfare (they don't), and whether poor families are willing to work (about two-thirds include wage-earners, up from about two-fifths in 1959).

The nation has also had twenty years' experience in learning what works. As many have noted during the recent congressional debate over Cost of Living Adjustments — COLAs — for people on social security, there has been marked progress in reducing poverty among the elderly. The reasons are clear enough: people without a source of income, when given a source of income, become less poor. In other words, when the problem is poverty: money works. And not just money in any form, but a money source that is at least minimally adequate, indexed to rise with inflation, and provided through a system with a broad political base.

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ment to create jobs amid widespread unemployment running at roughly 25 percent. Some ivory tower economists continued to produce elegant mathematical proofs that unemployment was theoretically impossible under free markets, at least in the long run. They were horrified with New Deal interventionism and held out for reliance on automatic market forces as the solution. This prompted John Maynard Keynes to say that "in the long run we are all dead!"

Keynes broke with the economics profession, was generally ostracized by it, and yet wrote one of the most influential books ever written on the subject, providing the basic theoretical underpinning for macroeconomic policy intervention to achieve full employment. Not only was Keynes able to show mathematically that unemployment is possible, but he developed a systematic fiscal policy model that could guide policy makers in determining the correct amount of stimulus to balance an economy's wave-like rises and falls. We have learned from the bitter experience of the 1960s that fiscal stimulus can be excessive and inflationary if not planned correctly.

There are two important lessons to be learned from Keynesianism in the 1930s. First, when market failures become such a political liability and create such serious social problems that these outweigh the benefits of market efficien-

If Congress had done for families with children (through a taxable children's allowance, or at the very least through a minimum welfare benefit that is indexed) what it did for the elderly, the latest report on "Children in Poverty" might have the same good news as reports on poverty among the aged.

Not surprisingly, more is also known about the operation and evaluation of programs intended to deal with some aspect of poverty, and about what exacerbates the problem. Just within the last five years, for example, a growing list of studies from agencies of the Congress as well as private and academic research organizations has concluded that recent cutbacks in programs like those providing income or job benefits (as well as changes in tax laws) account for an estimated one-fifth to one-third of the dramatic increase in poverty since 1978.

But that is only the most recent contribution to the issue. Since the "war on poverty" was declared by President Johnson two decades ago, congressional committees, special commissions, task forces, White House conferences, and an endless stream of reports and presidential pledges all have taken up the problem of poverty in the land of plenty. Today, the existence of what Michael Harrington once called the "other America" is no longer known to only a few. Rather, the statistics detailing the rise and fall and rise again of American poverty are government statistics, and many of the reports, full of ways to deal with the consequences of poverty, were commissioned by one or another level of government.

Meanwhile, economists working on Capitol Hill now talk of 8 percent unemployment as the "politically stable" rate — the rate below which no one in political life need worry — and the number of poor children with fully-employed parents continues to climb.

The fact of poverty isn't new, but two things have changed: the current president does not believe that preventing and alleviating poverty are among the proper roles of the federal government. And, although there has been little debate of the issue, and no carefully considered weighing of the alternatives, the federal budget process has been used to extricate the federal government from the effort over time. It is not just that federal policies are no longer measured in terms of whether they will prevent or add to poverty, or that effective programs have been scrapped along with the bad. A few years ago two-thirds of general federal tax revenues were spent on two items: military spending and interest on the debt. Today, that applies to nearly three-fourths of all federal spending, and by 1990 those two items will absorb 86 percent of all revenues collected. If the president and Congress insist on tax revisions that do nothing to bring in more revenue, the issue of a federal role in preventing or alleviating poverty will be largely academic. The questions posed by the bishops won't even apply.

So the question of responsibility for poverty lurks just below the surface of the current budget debate. The federal government may no longer be moved to action against poverty and its consequences, but conceding the points without a fight can hardly be described as "refashioning national policies with a preferential option for the poor." Our government has never acted on behalf of poor people without pressure, and thus far no sector of society has moved effectively to create the pressure for positive change: not the private charitable groups, not the state or local governments, and not the business community.

Two things are urgently needed, and on both the bishops can play a critical role. First, the bishops' letter stakes out a position that is very different from the president's on the responsibility of government toward the poor. That position needs to be defended: vigorously, publicly, repeatedly, in every conceivable forum.

Second, the bishops have a singular opportunity to provoke the equally vigorous debate required to change the way public and policy makers alike think about people who are poor and the programs they depend on.

Back in 1965, Molly Orshansky concluded by saying, "The poor have been counted many times. It remains now to count the ways by which to help them gain a new identity."

NANCY AMIDEI

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cies, government will act. Keynes offered a mode of intervention that could eliminate the market failure (in this case unemployment) without changing the fundamental capitalist economic system and which allowed markets for individual goods and services to function normally. There was no central allocation scheme, although there was a major new role for the federal government in directing the macroeconomy; there was no socialist revolution that changed the private property system or overturned the social order.

Second, Keynesian economics, properly understood, is essentially a planning model for macroeconomic policy. Once market interventions are presumed, they must be done in the context of a plan. It is absolutely essential to keep in mind this simple point. Only under complete laissez-faire does the invisible hand reconcile all conflicts. When markets fail and governments intervene, the shrillest voices and those with the most money and greatest political clout will reap the greatest rewards unless interventions are guided by a plan.

Beginning in the 1970s, there has been a new interest in government's role in the economy, stemming largely from structural imbalances that have become increasingly severe. The causes of these imbalances were external in origin: the OPEC oil price hikes and the maturing of the Japanese economy are two of the most prominent. Others, such as strengthened pollution controls and other domestic regulations, were self-inflicted. But adaptation to these changes has necessitated large structural realignments that have created serious economic and social dislocations which have met with great resistance.

Many economists see the need for a sector-specific form of policy that would improve the adaptation of our capitalist market system to these structural changes. Although we still have some macroeconomic problems to confront, we do have policy instruments and institutions with which to confront them if only we had the political will. But sectoral interventions will require a new policy model and some new, cooperative institutions for formulating priorities. Unlike macroeconomic planning, which essentially involves manipulating budget and monetary aggregates, sectoral planning involves fundamental tradeoffs among various industries, geographic regions, and basic human needs. As a consequence, the representative aspect of planning institutions becomes a central issue.

It is sometimes argued that the U.S. already has sectoral policies — a few successful, most problematic. Examples include agriculture, transportation, energy, and the myriad of industry-specific regulations, tax preferences, procurements, and trade policies. What is lacking is a guiding set of objectives precisely for the industrial structure of the economy. Thus, we impose anti-pollution regulations on our steel and automobile industries without a guiding set of objectives for those industries. We compensate for the adverse effects of these regulations by a system of trade protection, again without coordination. And another agency of government vigorously enforces the "antitrust" laws against firms in these industries, as though the free market were still operative.

Recognizing that many of our current economic woes are rooted in structural rather than macroeconomic market failures, why has there been so little impetus for action? I believe this is because we lack a modern-day Keynes to break the old intellectual mindset. Despite the fact that vested interests in our political system together with the imperative of social justice (that forms the political mandate in our society) continually force government to respond to the adverse consequences of market forces, a strong intellectual appeal to laissez-faire liberalism remains. To quote Keynes, as he rebutted his critics in 1936:

> The ideas of economists and political philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong, are more powerful than is commonly understood. Indeed, the world is ruled by little else. Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist. Madmen in authority, who hear voices in the air, are distilling their frenzy from some academic scribbler of a few years back. I am sure that the power of vested interests is vastly exaggerated compared with the gradual encroachment of ideas.

It was, after all, Adam Smith, back in 1776, who argued persuasively that competition, not cooperation, would produce the greatest wealth, not only for the individual, but also for society. Since no economist since Smith has held this view as unequivocally, one must go back to his *Wealth of Nations* to obtain the best statements of the laissez-faire doctrine. For example:

> It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard of their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity, but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessity but of their advantages. . . . People of the same trade seldom meet together, even for merriment and diversion, but the conversation ends in a conspiracy against the public, or in some contrivance to raise prices.

Despite the fact that our economy is very different from that in Adam Smith's time, and our social goals and political institutions have changed, we look to competition rather than cooperation as the preferred mechanism for insuring efficient and equitable resource allocation.

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YET WE DO have prototypes of cooperative planning efforts. I could point to numerous other countries, but there is also an example in our own congressional budget process. Until fairly recently, decisions on various categories of public expenditure were highly dependent on the power of the particular member of Congress who chaired the relevant committee. In 1974, the passage of the Budget Control and Impoundment Act changed this procedure. Now, Congress is forced to draw up a budget and to debate not only the merits or demerits of a particular item in isolation, but to set a limit on the total and to debate tradeoffs. Extended to the private sector, a similar national forum could help establish and crystallize priorities. A representative body faced with tradeoffs would offset the power of vested interest groups who each represent a single sector of the economy.

The scope of such a planning and participatory exercise should be the subject of national dialogue and debate, which is presumably what the bishops' pastoral letter has helped to initiate. The bishops' letter does not specify the particular mandate of such a body. But surely a starting point might be devoted to such issues as: what share of our Gross National Product should be devoted to health, education, urban infrastructure, and the like? What inconsistencies are present in our regulatory policies in transportation, food, high tech, and other industries?

Cooperative efforts might actually help markets to work better if such efforts could garner community support and advice that would facilitate adjustment to change. Sometimes, policy makers at the national level concoct schemes that look workable and humane on paper but are unacceptable to those who would be affected by the policies. For example, the provision of mobility grants for workers to move from depressed areas to growing regions of the country overlooked the fact that most people prefer to remain in their communities, and many older, established people simply cannot afford to move. Consequently, mobility grants drain depressed communities of their youngest and most vital workers, exacerbating the problem of the communities' viability and adding to the taxpayers' expense without solving the problem. This speaks of the need for planning at the national level — which is absolutely vital if effective redistribution is to occur — and local participation to ensure that aid is applied most effectively to where it is most needed. Without cooperation at the local level, community groups will be marshaled to forestall change, producing more lemon capitalism, and bloating the budget with political payoffs rather than effective adjustment assistance.

There is a final aspect of collaboration described in the bishops' pastoral which deserves fuller discussion — the notion of *workplace* cooperation, both between labor and management, and among workers. The idea that there is an inherent conflict of interest between workers and employers is, of course, deep-seated; not only in classical economics, but also in Marxian views of the inevitability of class conflict. Actually, in the tradition of Adam Smith, most economists have neglected the workplace. To quote Smith:

> Consumption is the sole end and purpose of all production; and the interest of the producer ought to be attended to, only so far as it may be necessary for promoting that of the consumer. The maxim is so perfectly self-evident that it would be absurd to attempt to prove it.

We need to pay more attention to our work lives. On the one hand, there is a new interest in the positive returns to cooperation in the form of productivity enhancement and quality control. Moreover, new technology is threatening the "deskilling" of many jobs and the depersonalization of human relations. Reports abound of the physical and emotional problems attendant to word processing and other computer-related jobs. And the use of computers enables employers to monitor workers' output in new ways. Finally, robotics and the like could produce major changes in the organization of work. Without cooperative planning for these changes within firms, the impact on our lives could be extraordinary.

The bishops' pastoral does not provide answers to the problems it addresses. To argue a need for foresight, for the setting of goals and priorities, and the recognition that market forces do not always produce desired outcomes merely frames the context for discussion. There are fundamental ethical principles that go beyond economics: the right to a job in a society that values work, to a decent level of material well-being in a society that values consumption, to an equitable income distribution; a concern with social problems that includes alienation and frustration; and a disenchantment with a political system that rewards wealth and vested interests at the expense of the poor and under-represented. But there is also a concern that people are losing faith in our free-enterprise economic system because of serious problems in major industries such as steel and autos, the crisis in agriculture, loss of American influence abroad, and our economic vulnerability to outside influences.

The pastoral letter rightly warns that this skepticism is undermining the credibility of our democratic way of life, and with it the moral principles that underpin our society and make it truly unique. We must begin to reorder our economic priorities on the basis of these moral principles and develop cooperative institutions to implement them.

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After liberal optimism, what?

GREGORY BAUM

VATICAN II introduced the Catholic church to the liberal tradition. In the nineteenth century the church had repudiated the liberal society then emerging in Europe and America. The church wanted nothing to do with democracy, civil liberties, pluralism. The *Syllabus of Errors* (1864) remains the unforgettable monument to the church's rejection of modernity. Catholic thinkers who tried to reconcile Catholicism with modern intellectual, ethical, and political aspirations got into trouble with the ecclesiastical authorities. It was only at Vatican Council II that the church as a whole opened itself, albeit in a critical manner, to modern society.

For many of us this was an occasion of joy. We were happy with the new emphasis on personal conscience, religious liberty, religious experience, and social responsibility. We welcomed the permission to participate in our culture, join others in building a humane society, and enter into dialogue with other Christians, Jews, and members of other religions. We were grateful that the council saw in the ethical achievements of people, be they religious or secular, the hidden work of God's grace in history.

The unforgettable monument to the new spirit was the conciliar document *Gaudium et Spes*. Here the church defined its relation to the world in dialogical fashion. The church was called to serve, and offer its truth, to the world; at the same time the church was also bound to listen to the world and learn from it.

During the council, I became friends with a young Italian, a Waldensian student of theology, then acting as a journalist. Paolo Ricca was puzzled by my enthusiasm for *Gaudium et Spes*. For him the document reflected too much the spirit of liberalism. Since I was not familiar with political science at the time, I did not understand what he meant. Liberalism to me meant the emphasis on the person, on personal vocation, personal growth, and personal responsibility; and after the collectivist and authoritarian style we had inherited in the church, I thought the new openness to liberal ideas was a good thing.

It took me many years to understand Paolo Ricca's remark. In preparation for the *"Theology in the Americas"* Conference of 1975, Phillip Berryman wrote an important article on the background of the 1968 Medellin Conference in Latin America, and the liberation theology that had influenced it and which in turn was being inspired by it. The article taught me the limitations of Vatican II. The open approach of the council reflected to a certain extent the cultural optimism of the sixties. The major intellectual influence had come from the bishops and theologians of the wealthy, capitalist democracies who shared the liberal confidence that the problems of the world could be gradually solved, that the economic and political development that had taken place in the successful Western democracies could be exported to the less developed parts of the world, and that greater generosity, sustained dialogue, and mutual understanding would be able to move the world to a higher stage of

EVER SINCE the Second Vatican Council, Catholics have been surveying and discussing the state of their church's renewal. The process is not new. But such scrutiny has taken on a new importance with the pope's announcement of an extraordinary synod to evaluate the Council's work and its aftermath. Between now and the opening of the synod next November, *Commonweal* will be publishing a series of articles, by no means focusing on *all* the issues raised by the Council, but on many which remain unsettled and sharply contested. Future articles will touch on questions of Catholic identity and essential dogma; the exercise of authority, conscience, and dissent; the church and women; current moral teaching; the life of prayer; and related themes. A number of distinguished thinkers have agreed to contribute their viewpoints. This is the first article in the series. THE EDITORS

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participation and exchange. This cultural mood made Teilhard de Chardin appear attractive. Our own history seemed inscribed in a divinely guided evolutionary thrust toward a higher form of life.

Phillip Berryman pointed out that the Latin American bishops at Medellin looked at the same world Vatican II had seen, but since they saw it from the periphery, the impoverished margin, they recognized few signs of encouragement. They were afraid. The world system with its center in the North seemed to be pushing their continent into ever greater dependency. Developments that looked promising from the middle-class perspective of the successful powers made them fear that the gap between rich and poor, between rich countries and poor countries, was becoming wider, and that the masses of people on their continent were being pushed into ever greater misery.

The emerging liberation theology of Latin America and the United States and the European political theology made me understand that by opening itself to dialogue with modern, liberal society, Vatican II had paid insufficient attention to the limits and ambiguities of the liberal tradition. While the new emphasis on personal conscience and personal development represented an undeniable progress, Catholics had not sufficiently thought through the problematic link of these ideas to individualism, the breakdown of social solidarity, the replacement of human values by the exchange value, the utilitarianism of public policies, and the cultural impact of capitalism. This was the issue raised by Paolo Ricca.

Catholics in North America welcomed Vatican II. In few parts of the world were the conciliar documents read, studied and acted upon as vigorously as in the United States and Canada. Holland was ahead of us in this. In Holland the Catholic population, at one time part of the lower classes, especially of farm communities in the south, with little influence on culture and society, had recently joined the middle class, entered the mainstream, and exercised power in their country. A similar situation existed in the United States.

Catholics, at one time largely working class and immigrants, had moved into the middle class; they were eager to participate actively in their society. They welcomed Vatican II because it laid a spiritual and theological foundation for their involvement in the world. Catholics were glad that Vatican II had affirmed religious liberty and human rights. They now involved themselves in the civil rights movement of the sixties. They also found the council inspiration for joining the peace movement against military involvement in Southeast Asia. The emphasis on personal freedom and self-responsibility, the recognition of the diversity of religious experience, and a certain resentment against bearers of authority allowed Catholics to feel at home in the culture of the sixties.

This new development put a question mark behind Catholic identity. Catholics enjoyed ecumenism, interreligious dialogue, and cooperation with secular men and women. They did not worry about their Catholic identity because they had been deeply immersed in the Catholic tradition through their earlier, largely pre-conciliar Catholic education. But for the new generation, for young people who only knew the open, ecumenical, liberal form of Catholicism, it became more difficult to define the meaning of their Catholic identity. They were not helped by the church's eccentric teaching on sexuality.

Against this weakening of identity we witnessed a reaction of Catholics who liked to call themselves conservative. They yearned for the Catholicism of yesterday. They remembered that to be Catholic and Christian demanded a critical distance from society. To protect a clearer sense of Catholic identity they advocated the return to pre-conciliar styles and attitudes. But such a return has become impossible. History cannot be turned back. The limits of liberalism must be overcome by moving forward, not backward.

AFTER the council, a growing number of Catholics uncomfortable with an assimilation to contemporary culture discovered a new distance from society through their emphasis on faith-and-justice. Political theology had called for the "deprivatization" of theology. It wanted to recover the social message of God's revelation in Israel and Jesus Christ. God stood with the poor, the weak, the oppressed, the exploited. Thus Latin Americans had the courage of faith to look at their own continent from the perspective of the masses caught in poverty and exclusion. Catholics in North America were increasingly willing to look at their society, not from the viewpoint of the middle class, but from the perspective of the people at the bottom. We cannot come to self-knowledge as a society unless we listen to the victims of society and analyze the social causes, including our own involvement, of their victimization.

Inspired by the black movement and black theology, Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans began to address their own Catholic church. Catholics became increasingly willing to listen to the voices of those who had been pushed to the margin. They were willing to confront "the other America," the unemployed and poverty-stricken sector. They listened to

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progressive women who protested against the subjugation inflicted on them by church and society. Many Catholics became increasingly suspicious in regard to mainstream culture which had made these structures of exclusion invisible to them. They were ready to listen to the voices of the third-world churches. They recognized that to understand North American society we must look at the global society since the dominant North American economy is intertwined with the economies of other continents. When ethical people look at the world as a totality, they are deeply shocked by the brutally unjust distribution of wealth and power. The injustice cries to heaven. Why had we not seen this before? Why did this come as a surprise to us? Mainstream culture with its built-in ideology has disguised the cruel reality from our eyes. For many Catholics it was only as they stood with Jesus in solidarity with the poor and oppressed that their eyes were opened to the sinfulness of the world.

The bishops of Canada and the United States were willing to join this new movement of faith-and-justice. The social messages of the Canadian bishops since 1975 and the pastoral letters on peace and economic justice of the American bishops have endorsed the option for the poor. Sociologists have a hard time explaining this. Usually the officers of powerful religious organizations identify with the establishment. This rule has been verified in much of Christian history. Why then have the North American bishops become critics of the powerful?

One reason for the bishops' preferential option has to do, I think, with the recovery of a Catholic and Christian identity. If faith is inextricably linked to justice, Christians find themselves at a distance from culture and society. This distance is then not defined by the sectarian aloofness of pre-conciliar times, but by the recognition of social sin and the ambiguity of the dominant culture. While Vatican II had very little to say about sin, episcopal and papal teaching over the last decade has tried to recover a biblical sense of sin, the sinfulness of the world, sin residing in the heart, and sin residing in structures of domination.

Gone is the mood of liberal optimism. Gone is the emphasis on personal growth and development. It has become unrealistic to expect solutions from the gradual evolution of the middle-class values and institutions we have inherited. What is required is conversion, repentance, the turn to a new direction, even if this means opposing the powerful and opting for radical social and economic policies. The American bishops have called for "a new American experiment," an order grounded in social solidarity, that will protect people's economic rights and dismantle the oppressive hegemony of the American economy in the world.

While this post-liberal pastoral proposal is grounded in the new approach of Vatican II, it also significantly transcends the council. The power elite of the United States, indifferent to the renewal of Vatican II, now vigorously opposes the orientation of Catholicism as defined by the bishops' pastorals on peace and economic justice.

It is important to emphasize that a post-liberal vision of society must save the great achievements of the liberal tradition, in particular the respect for personal conscience and personal freedom. While social solidarity and the struggle for justice demand many sacrifices, historical experience has taught us that the repression of dissent has devastating consequences. In the Christian tradition, respect for persons is metaphysically grounded: the respect is related to the doctrine of creation, redemption, and sanctification. This is a warning that applies to political as well as ecclesiastical policies.

In Rome the new emphasis on faith-and-justice has been welcomed, at least on paper. The encyclicals of John Paul II have not only supported the movement, they have even given it a more radical edge through their critique of contemporary capitalism. How seriously Rome takes this in practice remains to be seen. There is a danger that the post-liberal teaching, demanded by the world crisis and useful for a clearer sense of Catholic identity, will be used by Rome as an ideology to defend the return to authoritarianism. The adoption of a post-liberal, solidarity vision of society is dangerous unless it has passed through a liberal phase. The authoritarianism, which lies like a curse on the Catholic tradition, has not been wholly overcome through the teaching of Vatican II on the dignity of the person nor its emphasis on the ideal of collegiality. There are many signs that certain circles at the Vatican wish to enhance Catholic identity not by following the bishops of the Americas into a new pastoral project but by returning to old patterns of domination and the contempt of women.

The new orientation of Catholicism, defined by the preferential option for the poor, has brought the church into a new, critical relation to modern society. All too often the church has found itself catching up with cultural developments. Yet if this new movement can be sustained, the church may come to exercise critical and constructive leadership in modern society — in the capitalist West, the socialist East, and the struggling third-world nations. Since Western and Eastern empires are trapped in death-dealing ideologies, since liberalism and Marxism are in a state of crisis, since the domination of scientism or positivism on the right and on the left have handed over society to value-free social engineering, the present age offers an unusual opportunity to Catholicism, present in West, East and South, to make a constructive contribution to an alternative world order. The option for the poor weds certain aspirations of the Enlightenment with an ancient biblical heritage. It combines bold rationality with religious compassion. It opens up the most promising elements of the modern project to ethical and religious resources that modernity had overlooked.

If the Catholic church can be faithful to the decentralizing collegial tradition affirmed at Vatican II, if it can give up its tragic, oppressive, self-defeating bureaucratic centralism, and if it can come to recognize the equality of men and women, Catholicism may come to exercise a liberating, healing effect on world society. It could affirm in dialectical fashion the critical tradition inherited from the Enlightenment: it could negate the positivism and utilitarianism that have become associated with the modern project, and foster ethical and religious values as the cultural context of the struggle for a more just and more humane society.

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A VISIT PLAYED IN DIFFERENT TEMPOS

The two popes of the lowlands

JOHN A. COLEMAN

JOHN PAUL II has now completed, with a ten-day visit to the Benelux nations in May, his pastoral visitations to every Western European country with a significant Catholic population. The trip to the Netherlands captured most of the superficial media attention, although the visit to Belgium turned out to exhibit a much more interesting pope and church. Both visits told the world as much about the state of local Catholicism in the two nations as about the pontiff.

The Dutch church is deeply, even bitterly, polarized, reeling in the aftermath of a series of unpopular conservative episcopal appointments. The pope acknowledged this polarization during the Mass in Utrecht: "You Dutch Catholics have built many good things in your own land and elsewhere in the missions. This ripe fruit of faith and love must not be allowed to disappear. . . . I fervently hope that the divisions and oppositions which have darkened that faith and chilled that love might be overcome in truth and charity." In pleading to the sparse congregation in Den Bosch that they accept the wisdom of his choice of the outspoken conservative, Johannes Ter Schure, to succeed the much loved pastoral bishop, Johannes Bluyssen, the pope suggested that the unity he foresees will occur when "all bundle together around the bishop and his representative in the local community, the pastor."

The moderate center — which by every sociological indicator over a twenty-year period represents the overwhelming majority of practicing Dutch Catholics — has experienced what seems in its eyes an unbroken series of fifteen years of misunderstanding and sharp rebuffs from Rome and the new conservative bishops. This moderate center has been misleadingly painted in the world press as wild, latitudinarian, "secretly Protestant." In fact, their list of particulars for a renewed church looks remarkably the same as that of the moderate center in American or, as events later showed, Flemish Catholicism. The only difference is that, in typically Dutch fashion, they voice their platform in undiplomatically blunt terms.

Earlier this year a remarkable book became an instant best-seller in the Netherlands. Entitled *From the Depths of Our Hearts: Open Letters to Pope John Paul II*, the book contains a compendium of heart-rending pleas by retired bishops, religious provincials, cabinet ministers, journalists, scholars, ordinary mothers, and career women for a better understanding by Rome of Dutch Catholicism. Its key demands envision an authority open to dialogue; a pastoral approach to those who cannot live up to the unbending Catholic sexual morality; awareness of the reality and tensions of being a Catholic "good citizen" in a pluralistic democratic society; some constitutional concern to give the local church a voice within the world church; an expanded role for women in the church. Behind the specifics lies a palpable anxiety about the urgency of passing on the faith to the next generation, which has been abandoning the Dutch church in droves.

The complaints of the Dutch moderates today focus more on their bishops than on Rome. A week before the papal visit, the moderates organized a jumbo exposition in the Hague celebrating the church the Dutch bishops would not let the pope see, "The Other Face of the Church." Under circus tents, every religious topic from A to Z was discussed. Featured speakers included the theologian, Edward Schillebeeckx; the Argentine Nobel Peace Prizewinner, Alfonso Perez-Esquivel; and Marga Klompe, twice a cabinet minister in Dutch governments. (Radicals such as the internationally known liturgist Huub Oosterhuis were excluded from the program.) This alternative exposition far outdrew the disappointing papal crowds in the Hague a week later. It showed to its more than 10,000 visitors a lively local church of basic scriptural communities, a church concerned for peace and justice, prayer renewal, pastoral outreach, and catechesis.

Asked, on the eve of the papal visit, to comment on the Dutch moderates' unrest, Rome's apostolic delegate to the Netherlands, Archbishop Edward Cassidy, remarked, "Some feel that the Holy Father treats them like children in need of discipline rather than as mature Catholics trying to respond to the challenges of Dutch society. They feel Pope John Paul II doesn't listen to what they want to say and that the trip is organized so there will be no chance to dialogue with him while he is here."

There is some merit to the moderates' complaint that the papal trip was organized so ordinary Catholics would have little chance to dialogue. A year ago Utrecht's Cardinal Adrian Simonis warned that only "loyal" Catholics would be allowed access to the pope, where "loyalty" seemed rather narrowly

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drawn so as to exclude any critical word. This represents an especially surprising demand in a country where loyalty to *any* institution — whether the Dutch monarchy, army, or democracy — would be impossible if it could not be critical. To any outsider, Dutch critical loyalty and honest discourse sometimes seem a bit blunt and irreverent, leaving as little to the imagination as the tasteless sex shops which dot the land. But it generally works well in wider Dutch society as it did in Dutch Catholicism in the 1960s. Those in the know also realize that Dutch criticism often masks a deeper, even passionate, love for the truth of an institution. It makes up in sincerity what it lacks in subtlety.

The official Dutch committee for the preparation of the papal visit engaged in much overkill. For months, Cardinal Simonis tried to cut off any access of critical voices to the papal entourage. Shortly before the actual visit, Simonis forebade the earlier proposed intervention of Nijmegen's sixty-five-year-old feminist theologian, Tina Halkes, a representative — by American standards — of moderate, if firm, feminism. Halkes, mother of three children, had been the unanimous choice of Dutch Catholic Women's Organizations to represent them during the papal Mass in Utrecht. The same preparatory committee demanded an unnecessarily large and visible police cordon for security. As it turned out, this request actually backfired. The unwonted visibility of the Dutch police in such large force drew anarchist elements to Utrecht which led to riots. Massive police presence and security precautions severely complicated access for those who actually may have desired to take to the streets to see the pope.

IN THE END, the most memorable intervention was that of Groningen's Mrs. Hedwig Wasser who departed from her approved text to ask of the pope that the church show some pastoral sympathy toward divorced and homosexual Catholics. "An outstretched hand is pastorally more inviting than a wagging finger. . . . We desire bishops who accompany their people on their pilgrims' way instead of sitting over them high on their thrones." Mrs. Wasser made clear, in a subsequent interview, that her remarks were aimed more at the Dutch bishops than the pope.

Perhaps only in the Netherlands would a practicing Catholic prime minister, Ruud Lubbers, publicly tell the pope, "Rome seems sometimes so far away from us, and the word Rome — I will not try to hide it — calls forth for many in this country a feeling of reserve, even at times, distrust." Lubbers firmly reminded the pope that in the Netherlands women enjoy full legal equality and that tolerance is a prime Dutch virtue. The Catholic majority leader of the parliament, Professor Piet Steenkamp, made much the same case in a private audience with the pope where Steenkamp raised the issue of the ordination of women. Steenkamp reports that John Paul II's now much-quoted reply was the terse, "There were no women present at the Last Supper."

In many ways the Dutch organizers of the papal trip did not give the Netherlands a chance to see the whole pope. The sites and themes they set to present John Paul II did not let him speak enough about peace, world justice, or faith and culture, themes he effectively addressed the following week in Belgium. He was not put into the middle of a vigorous Dutch Pax Christi group where this pope, "the pilgrim of peace," might have felt at home and found an enthusiastic response. (Pax Christi had requested his presence.) Nor did the organizers give him a platform to highlight the North-South debate, unemployment, or guest-workers. They did not present him in a Catholic university setting as was done so tellingly on several occasions in Belgium where the former university professor showed a popular and deft touch with students. Notably, since the retirement of Cardinal Willebrands several years ago, the now conservative Dutch episcopacy remains relatively reticent on most social issues. The pope's major social message on Dutch soil, delivered in English and on his own terms, consisted in a ringing condemnation of apartheid in his address to the International Court of Justice in the Hague.

Although Dutch Catholics gave the pope high marks for learning their language, John Paul II was somewhat hampered by a language he only partly controls which left him no chance to show that spontaneous warmth in improvising, so winsome in his visits to other countries. In the end, John Paul II seemed, in the Netherlands, a more one-sided pope than he actually is, consistently pleasant and courteous but isolated, preoccupied with traditional sexual morality — without the pastoral nuances on this issue he showed in Belgium — and with the dangers of relativism and subjectivism in modern pluralistic Western societies.

Several aspects of the Dutch church become evident through the lens of the papal visit. If the papal crowds are any indication, the conservative Dutch bishops' program of restoration lacks the silent majority of support that is often claimed. Every cut deeper into the ordinary Dutch Catholic world reveals a Mrs. Wasser, a moderate, committed Catholic who seeks dialogue and pastoral compassion, and bishops who join themselves to the joys and sorrows — and real questions — of their people. John Paul II showed his own best pastoral instincts by departing from the approved itinerary to pay a prolonged visit to the ailing Cardinal Alfrink, much criticized by Dutch conservatives for his leadership of the church in the 1960s.

Everyone agrees there is a crisis concerning church authority in the Netherlands. Disagreements are strongly felt about

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how to solve the crisis. If, over the years, Rome and the conservative Dutch bishops have shown a legitimate, if perhaps exaggerated, fear of a loss of unity in the essentials of the faith, they have yet to succeed in showing ordinary Dutch Catholics that they believe as strongly in those other two elements in the famous traditional threefold pastoral charge to the church: "In essentials, *unity*; in disputed and non-essential questions, *freedom*; and in all things, *charity*." No one expects the mistrust, bitterness, name-calling, and polarization of a decade to disappear overnight. Those, like myself, who had hoped that this powerful and winning pope might somehow pull off the much-needed reconciliation, may have to accept the judgment of Rex Brico, the Netherland's most respected and objective religious journalist: "It was not really his heart that John Paul left here. And perhaps that was the only thing that could have brought reconciliation a step closer."

JOHN PAUL II visibly left his heart in Belgium, a country whose people he came to know when, as a graduate student in Rome, he lived at the Belgian College. In Mechelen where the pope celebrated his sixty-fifth birthday amidst a joyous cacophony of church bells and a cheering multitude, he proclaimed in Dutch, "Today the pope is totally Flemish."

The Belgium trip had been carefully planned, with small groups in parishes and university settings debating the present Belgian church's pastoral needs. Belgium's bishops encouraged their people to frank, if polite, address. No questions to the pope were censored. Jean Huark, bishop of Tournai, wrote before the visit, "We should not make the pope more than the pope."

Many of the sites chosen to present the pope must have delighted the Belgian tourist office: the market square in Antwerp and Brussels, Bruges, Ghent, Leuven. The visit reached back to unifying symbols of past Catholic vitality: the graves of the ecumenical pioneer Cardinal Mercier and the social thinker and organizer Cardinal Cardijn, founder of the Young Christian Worker movement. The pope met representative groups of artists, students, labor leaders. Unlike the Netherlands where both Amsterdam and Rotterdam (the brain and muscle of the land) were off-limits, in Belgium the pope could venture, with great effect, to the urban and cultural centers. In Ieper in Flanders Fields he articulated a call for world peace. In Brussels' market square he addressed new immigrants, guest-workers not always welcome in a Belgium of high unemployment. In Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve he essayed his vision of the role of a Catholic university.

John Paul II must have been carefully coached to avoid pitfalls. He kissed the ground in Brussels (neutral bi-lingual territory) to avoid the embarrassment of first kissing Flemish ground at the airport. Nowhere did his gestures or remarks imply support for the Christian Democratic party, a delicate question in a Belgian election year and a topic which divides the Flemish from the French-speaking, who are less likely to organize their social world in Catholic organizational enclaves. He also deftly side-stepped the issue of amnesty for World War II criminals, another point which divides Flemish and Walloons. He delivered an equal number of texts in Dutch and French.

The size and enthusiasm of the Belgian crowds equaled those on other papal visits. What set this tour off from others, however, was that here the format of interspersing papal speeches and homilies with questions or speeches reflecting local pastoral concerns worked well. At almost every stop polite but critical voices raised the same issues which trouble the Dutch moderates.

The pope took it all in stride. He listened intently in Liège as Ann Marie Gilson, a mother and professional woman, told him that while she honors motherhood she also expects from the church some other more nuanced message about the role of women in modern society and the church. In Antwerp's newly restored cathedral, beneath priceless Rubens altar paintings, the pope listened carefully as Aurelian Thijs, the president of the inter-diocesan pastoral council, spoke of lay co-responsibility in the church and, echoing Mrs. Wasser in the Netherlands, called for a moral pastoral solution for divorced and gay Catholics. In his response, the pope said that "In delicate situations [such as divorce] one must never deprive people of hope." John Paul abandoned his prepared text to the Belgian bishops to let them celebrate his birthday. In doing so, the pope advised the bishops to read his text at their leisure and to "relativize it" a bit. Antwerp's Bishop Paul van den Berghe picked up on this theme, citing the need to put the numerous papal comments on such a visit into their travel context, not taking them more seriously than the pope intends. Again: "Don't make the pope more than the pope."

Van den Berghe's remarks seemed necessary because the pope was attended, throughout the visit, by a well organized *Opus Dei* claque who loudly booed whenever any critical voice was raised, even when the critics were reading texts previously approved by Rome and the bishops. Msgr. Musty, auxiliary bishop of Namur, commented, "The commandos of *Opus Dei*, some coming from outside the country, have followed the pope everywhere. . . . They handled themselves in perfectly boorish ways which reminded me of other regimes of devious memory."

AS IN THE Netherlands, the Belgian media star was a woman who departed from an approved text, Monique Oruba, the representative of the students at Louvain-la-Neuve. Perhaps the pope listened to her discourse especially intently since she, the daughter of a Polish immigrant to the Belgium mining area, finished her comments in Polish. Ms. Oruba gently chided the pope for some of his positions regarding the church in Latin America and liberation theology. She added, "We find it hard to believe that the use of contraceptives puts Catholic couples on the margins of the church."

The pope kissed Ms. Oruba. At the end of his discourse in Louvain-la-Neuve, John Paul was presented with a student beenie. Playfully improvising in French, he told a cheering student audience that perhaps he should replace his papal skull cap for a student's hat once again. Smiling, he went on to suggest that he could not simultaneously wear both hats.

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No one expects that the papal visit to Belgium will bring sweeping changes. Many of the questions posed to the pope never received a papal answer. Notably, he side-stepped two eloquent cases for academic freedom in theology at Catholic Universities made by the rectors of Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve. On getting on the plane to fly back to Rome, John Paul told Belgium's Catholics, "I did not answer all your questions but rest assured that I will take them back with me to weigh pastorally." In Belgium John Paul II's visit set the local church to honest questions about its future, its evangelical witness, its pastoral plans. It occasioned a visible public demonstration of the collective weight and importance of Catholicism.

To the editorial writer for the Flemish Catholic daily, *De Standard*, the visit showed that "the representatives of 'God's people which asks questions' have courageously and honestly spoken. Even the most controversial issues came up, without any aggression or provocation. The openness to listen on the part of the pope was total and unfeigned. . . . The papal visit showed us an enormous readiness of our people to continue living and working enthusiastically within an open Catholicism. People have seen, to their great wonderment, that here in the old Western world the church is on the move. The church on its part has seen the dynamism of Catholics who want to contribute to renewal from their own deeper return to the evangelical sources." France's *Le Monde* noted that the Belgian trip might serve as a model for future papal trips: instead of only speeches by the pope, a true dialogue of local church and supreme pastor.

Many Catholics the world over were pained and saddened to see the empty streets in the Netherlands and the need to abandon the pope-mobile for a closed limousine. For Catholic sensibilities, the papacy remains an essential depth symbol of Catholic unity and a bridge to the world church. The pope is called to fulfill the indispensable Petrine function in the church, strengthening his brothers and — as Belgium left no doubt — his sisters in the ministry. The pope represents the supreme, but not unique, teaching authority in the church. The Belgium trip shows that the pope loses none of his authority when these themes become the focus of a papal trip in a local church where the bishops are truly spokesmen for the faith that lives in their midst. By its response and gestures, the Belgian church paraphrased the Bishop of Tournai: "Rejoice in the pope and let the pope be fully pope but, please, don't make the pope more than the pope." For in a truly Catholic church there must always be room for many kinds of hats.

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Screen

BIRTH OF LEGENDS

UNCHAINING LOSS & HISTORY

ACCORDING TO Santayana, "those who do not remember the past are condemned to relive it." The question these days is,"Which history?" Use of the popular phrase, "No more Vietnams," illustrates just how far proverbs get you in dealing with life. To one group of Americans it means never fight another war against a third-world country. To another group, it means never lose another to a Communist insurrection.

There is no question what Sylvester Stallone thinks, or rather feels (and here, the distinction is key). As he says near the opening of *Rambo: First Blood II*, when he first hears of a new venture in Southeast Asia, "Do we get to win this one?" The film—the most riveting action adventure movie of the last half decade — largely replays the war by using the character of Rambo that has replaced Rocky (I, II, or III) as a vehicle for Stallone. In the original *First Blood*, Rambo was a returning Vietnam vet, enraged at ingratitude back home. In *First Blood II*, the sympathy due to a returning soldier is linked to the emotional issue of soldiers who haven't yet returned — possible POWs still "missing in action." (The fate of the POW has occasioned other recent films, *Uncommon Valor*, with Gene Hackman, and *Missing in Action*, with Chuck Norris, another no-nonsense primitive in the Stallone-Eastwood mold.) The plot of *First Blood II* is for Stallone as Rambo to rescue some Americans in a Vietnamese prison. There are two separate issues here — missing and possibly abandoned U.S. servicemen and the outcome of the Vietnam War. *Rambo* joins them like the two cannisters which, together, are supposed to detonate our binary nerve gas weapons. It should come as no surprise that "we get to win this one."

Whatever one's politics, on one level the film is hard to resist, which may make it all the more dangerous. Stallone, who co-wrote the screenplay, provides heroism on a grand scale, and George Cosmatos uses superb editing to play every card in an action director's deck. The film lasts less than two hours, but not a moment is wasted; there's even a final helicopter chase scene that redeems the clichéd quality of such sequences. Along the way to victory in Vietnam, Rambo beats up on prison guards, river pirates, Russian special forces thugs, one particularly sadistic colonel, and finally an American politico who commissioned the MIA search (for ulterior purposes) to begin with. *Rambo* provides a hearty contrast of pure good vs. pure evil, and Stallone's performance makes the aging Roger Moore's simultaneous reappearance as James Bond in *A View to a Kill* pale to insignificance.

Rambo is a compelling synthesis of some old and new

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heroic characteristics. He's half Indian and half German, we're told, and uses the former's bow and arrow with the latter's deadly efficiency. He disdains the hi-tech with which he is equipped and against which he must fight. Indeed, according to Rambo, "I've always believed the mind is the best weapon." Stallone displays mind (or primitive intuition) in perpetually outwitting the enemy; stripped to a few rags, his body complements this stark minimalism. With his bare physique and his Indian haircut and headband, Stallone crossbreeds *Pumping Iron* and Geronimo.

The Indian motif is at the center of the revisionism in *Rambo*: its image of the American soldier as victim. Veterans have asserted this loudly, especially in the last few months. In the film Rambo describes their mood when he says he returned home from Asia to find "another war against all soldiers." To be sure, soldiers are victimized in war. To be sure, whatever one's feelings about Vietnam, it was wrong to blame GIs drafted into fighting, or skimp on their benefits thereafter. But it's stretching things to turn this replay of Vietnam into a wholesale victimization of American soldiers and no one else. There is one good Asian in the film — naturally, a young and rather starlet-looking Vietnamese girl who provides the love interest. But that's the extent of sympathy for the Southeast Asians caught in an awful mess.

Rambo also stretches things when it suggests that American soldiers could have won in Vietnam if allowed to fight like its hero. In arguing this, it becomes cinema's first "stab-in-the-back" treatment of Vietnam, and a total inversion of such earlier anti-war films as *Apocalypse Now*. But the problem with Stallone's mythmaking is that somebody did fight like Rambo in Vietnam — the Vietcong, with their primitive technology and expertise in jungle warfare that mysteriously seems to desert them in the film when confronted by Stallone. As I recall, American methodology was hi-tech and high-altitude; the only way it could have "won" was by devastating the country it was intended to save. And in this it almost succeeded.

But *Rambo* is not much for context, which is exactly why it will win rousing cheers across theaters all summer. Indeed, what Stallone has brilliantly, almost perversely, done with this story is lift it entirely out of context to mate it with some potent, ongoing myths in American culture. In *Rambo* he blends the victim status of the veteran and POW with the classic, loner-maverick image of American legend. He provides a new, topical embodiment of the populist Odd Man Out against the System — with the System, this time, identified with the liberal left. You could almost run for president on such a myth.

HISTORY ALSO dominates several recent European imports, although not in the manner of *Rambo*. None of these films is perfect, but all are interesting in their handling of the past, particularly past problems of war and dictatorship.

The Holy Innocents is a Spanish film on the "salt of the earth," especially one peasant family in the late Franco period who lives in semi-feudal obligation to the nobility in mountainous Estremadura. It stars Francisco Rabal (seen earlier in *Nazarin, Belle du Jour,* and *Viridiana*) as a tender cretin named Azarias, and Alredo Landa as Paco, Azarias's brother-in-law and a servant who is obsessively devoted to maintaining old loyalties. Both men won best acting awards in Cannes in 1984. One scene, in particular, stands out: when hunting, Paco's young master Ivan asks him to display his sure talent at finding snipe after the birds are gunned down by aristocrats hidden in blinds. The massacre over, the nobles follow Paco as he sniffs along the ground like a dog, in pure bliss to be at their service.

Paco's deep loyalty eventually makes for stark tragedy at the end of the film, intended by director Mario Camus (director of *The Beehive)* as a metaphor on the death of feudalism. Unfortunately, the climax is not well prepared dramatically, and the whole tale is told in complicated flashbacks that weaken its impact. A simple story like this called for a simpler mode of narration. *The Holy Innocents* is rich in texture and character, but just not appropriately structured.

Secret Places is also provocative but flawed. It concerns the uproar caused in a rural English girls' school by the arrival of a German girl whose family has fled Nazism at the outbreak of World War II. *Secret Places* is the kind of movie needed for the anniversaries observed this spring and summer, since to most American youth the past starts somewhere around 1984. In outline, the film provides an unusual angle on many neglected World War II facts, i.e., that some Germans resisted Hitler, that Western democracies sometimes resembled tyrannies in their treatment of refugee aliens. And, refreshingly, it focuses on girls, particularly the friendship between the German girl (Marie-Therese Relin, niece of Maximilian Schell) and her coltish, innocent, English protector (Tera MacGowran).

Unfortunately, director Zelda Barron (a collaborator on *If* and *Morgan*) doesn't seem to know whether she wants to develop foreground or background, and ends by shortchanging both. The screenplay is rushed, as if Barron were afraid to let a single dialogue last more than twenty lines, hardly helpful in a film about emotional development. The acting is uneven: although the girls excel, the parents seem awkward, and references to a German son left behind — a Luftwaffe pilot who informed the Gestapo of his father's dissent — are used too frequently and lamely to pinpoint narrative climaxes. Barron seems to have wanted to catch the hectic, frenzied rhythm of adolescence. It only half-works.

The best of these foreign films is *MacArthur's Children*, a Japanese production about preservation of identity despite surrender. Postwar Japan is seen through the eyes of schoolchildren on an island in the "inland sea," as they react to the American occupation force. The plot dramatizes their adjustment to the new, intrusive cultural seductions offered by the West. The children's school teacher (Matsako Natsume) tells the students that although their nation lost the war, "our souls are not occupied." Different nations take defeat differently. As Santayana once suggested, some even learn.

TOM O'BRIEN

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Hearing whispers of poetry

PETER LaSALLE

THE PRESS that the short story has been receiving in America in the last dozen or so years reads like the extinction warnings for some rare bird.

First came reports that the story was an endangered species. Many of the big-circulation magazines that used to feature the genre had folded, and the old strongholds, like *Esquire* and *The New Yorker*, were cutting back on the number of stories in each issue, devoting more space to non-fiction. The real low was probably marked by Reynolds Price's review of *The Best American Short Stories 1979* in *The New York Times Book Review*. Price suggested that if the story was endangered, it should just as well be left to quiet extinction. In his opinion, contemporary readers wanted their fiction in novels. And the story hadn't already died only because it remained the staple, easily executed exercise for graduate writing workshops at universities, where teachers weren't being frank with student writers by not telling them that the form was hopelessly passé.

But possibly those workshops proved a wildlife refuge for the short story, one of the places where the species' shaky existence was protected. For the last few years, *Publishers Weekly*, *The New York Times Book Review*, and the whole literary gang have been pronouncing that the short story is back. Not only are there well-received volumes of stories from the long careers of elder American masters, such as Peter Taylor, but many trade publishers seem to be forgetting the old rule that a younger writer who wants a collection published better have a successful novel first. The houses are bringing out first and second collections by those who write only short stories, such as the highly touted Raymond Carver, a current celebrity of the genre.

Well, if Price's thoughts on the story's demise were exaggerated, then this rash of current reporting on the boom may be overstating the case as well. Nevertheless, it is true that more books of stories are appearing, and they are drawing considerable attention.

Mr. and Mrs. Baby is a first collection by Mark Strand. Author of several very respected volumes of poetry in the surrealist vein, Strand brings the same eerie landscape of the dream, where life is pared down to the symbolic and universal, to these prose pieces. In "Under Water," the narrator seems to be swimming through the blurred scenes of his past, moving effortlessly, liquidly, to Nova Scotia, to Rio, to New York, to Italy, while friends and loved ones as easily appear and disappear. In "Mr. and Mrs. Baby," there are pat sections — "Mr. and Mrs. Baby at Breakfast," "Mr. and Mrs. Baby Have a Good Cry," etc. The quotidian for an apparently perfect young California couple starts to seem strange and altogether haunting, like an ongoing vision from ongoing sleep. Throughout these stories the motifs are intense sexual longing and the lost feeling of the traveler, the latter aptly expressed in the opening of the story "Zadar": "There are times when to be alone is to be seized by panic. It happens usually in places far from home where the language is unknown, where one is without friends and where none of the props by which emptiness is concealed or disguised are at hand."

MR. AND MRS. BABY AND OTHER STORIES
Mark Strand
Knopf, $11.95, 112 pp.

TO LENINGRAD IN WINTER
STORIES
Steven Schwartz
University of Missouri, $7.95, 88 pp.

PRIZE STORIES
THE O. HENRY AWARDS 1985
William Abrahams, Editor
Doubleday, $16.95, 319 pp.

LATER THE SAME DAY
Grace Paley
Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, $13.95, 211 pp.

Needless to say, such language is quite handsome. And overall Strand succeeds in this fiction debut, except for a couple of stories that are just comedy skits straining for laughs, the very weakest about an out-of-work general reduced to listening to taped sounds of war.

University presses are almost as active in publishing short story collections today as they are in publishing poetry collections. One of the most respected enterprises is the University of Missouri Press's Breakthrough Series in fiction. It annually presents a first collection, and this year's is *To Leningrad in Winter* by Steven Schwartz.

Schwartz opts for the traditionally realistic, his characters either confused children or confused young marrieds from that class usually called Yuppie Americanus. A grade-school boy encounters insomnia ("I Can't Sleep Anymore"); a young and unemployed husband accepts his wife's infidelity ("Monkey Business"); two young couples, one the bona fide owners of a condo and a Volvo wagon, confess sadnesses ("Society of Friends"). Schwartz's effects are smooth and understated, movingly so. Simply enough, the man knows a lot about how people live today. He does commit the darkest of sins in offering a story about students in a

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creative writing program. Stories about writers can be boring enough; stories about would-be writers yearning to be writers go well over the line of common decency. However, all can be forgiven after reading "Slow-Motion," a tender, comic portrait of the world of the teenage male who doesn't know how to handle the advances of a precocious girl and tries to weasel out of inevitable combat with a bullying kid from gym class.

Actually, "Slow-Motion" was chosen for the annual anthology, *Prize Stories: The O. Henry Awards*, a couple of years ago, and no larger consideration of the contemporary American short story is complete without some mention of this anthology and its companion annual of fiction selected from periodicals, *The Best American Short Stories*. *The Best American* probably draws more attention, especially now that it has a policy of rotating the editorship. Yet both are noble (despite Reynolds Price's grumbling, mentioned earlier), and one of the two first-prize stories that the longstanding *O. Henry* editor William Abrahams selected this year is so brilliant and moving that his critical acumen remains solidly affirmed. The story is "Hot Ice" by Stuart Dybek. With the intensity of a prayer, it builds on a local legend of a girl who drowned and who haunts an ice house, maybe as a saint and maybe as a ghost, in a gritty South Chicago neighborhood. That the story originally appeared in the literary magazine *Antaeus* is significant, because it must be admitted that the bulk of the serious work in the story today is in numerous such publications (call them literary, little, or quarterly, many of them relatively new), as opposed to the remaining big-circulation organs that still publish fiction. Sure, you can find gems in *The Atlantic*. Ward Just's story, "About Boston," gives good evidence of that, and the magazine remains the acknowledged leader in the "slick" category. The others have lost ground, most notably *The New Yorker*, also represented admirably by John Updike's "The Other." But more often, in the week-to-week reality of it, *The New Yorker* seems to be favoring chicly quiet, formulaic attempts by younger writers usually imitating the popular Ann Beattie. In other words, fiction that is moodily pretty, like the magazine's pastel covers of Manhattan in the snow or beach umbrellas on Long Island, but not much more than that.

GRACE PALEY writes only short stories. And fortunately so for us, because she is among the current virtuosos of the form, along with (on my list) Andre Dubus, Donald Barthelme, and Joyce Carol Oates. *Later the Same Day* is only her third collection in over twenty-five years, so it doesn't seem an overstatement to label its appearance an event.

Paley's instinct as a story teller is so true it is almost primal — at once as simple and as magically complicated as that often cited first act of narration when the hunter clad in animal furs returned to the cave and grunted to those listening the equivalent of "Let me tell you what happened." Her protagonists are usually women. They are a little older now and have been through the wilds of marriages and children, left-wing activism, and New York City's vanishing neighborhood life. Several of the best feature a middle-aged, sometimes separated woman aptly named Faith. In "Dreamer in a Dead Language" she visits her father, "one of the resident poets of the Children of Judea, Home for the Golden Ages, Coney Island Branch"; she runs into a crazed pharmacist from the old neighborhood in "Zagrowsky Tells"; and she is reunited with her estranged husband Jack in "Listening," making love and talking politics in an unexpected and beautifully golden little time of understanding with the man who has put her through much pain. Dialogue serves as the major vehicle of narration throughout. The everyday speech is rendered with perfect pitch, often left on its own and without quotation marks, until the talk itself, in an avant-garde way, becomes a major statement. The human feeling and empathy that lie in just the floating presence of so many voices is something very special in what can frequently seem a dehumanized technological world. Notice the wonderful, sometimes outright funny detailing, like that expressed in this male character's telling lines: "She really gets up this time. I think she must be a woman's libber, they don't like remarks about nightgowns. Bathrobes she didn't mind." In short, these stories feel as if they can heal in themselves.

Overall observations?

What struck me about reading these books, along with the several other recent releases that arrived in the mail as substance for this essay, is how poetic an entity a good short story is, and how there looms a very large chasm between the short story and the novel. Not that the story is a poem (something that Flannery O'Connor pointed out a while back, when she defined the short story by listing several things that it definitely isn't), and granting that the caveman's instinct ("Let me tell you what happened," the narrative base) is the essence. But suggestions of poetry seemed to be whispering to me at every turn — for instance, Strand, the poet, and his clear, rhythmical language. University presses now see it as their responsibility to publish both poetry collections and story collections, like Schwartz's, without a similar responsibility to the novel. The literary magazines are where both serious poems and stories usually first appear (though not to be too hard on *The New Yorker*, I should mention that some of the pieces by Strand and Paley originally came out there). And when stories are truly special — several of Paley's and Dybek's *O. Henry* winner — they possess almost the texture of a poem. They are always stories above all, but with the compactness, the verbal music, the ability in their brevity not to have to say *too* much and without all the often forced plot structure that has to propel a 300-page novel. Which is to say, short stories have the ability to reflect our lives in their everyday mystery, the way they really are.

The serious short story will never have the mass appeal of the novel. But it is very healthy today, and its continued well-being is probably ensured in this time when the electronic visual media encroaches more and more on the novel's territory of the pure narrative. Yes, stories have that extra poetic element, the conjuring power of words and words alone.

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Books: THE FUTURE IN OUR PAST

THE NEEDS OF STRANGERS

Michael Ignatieff
Viking, $14.95, 156 pp.

EXODUS AND REVOLUTION

Michael Walzer
Basic Books, $15.95, 192 pp.

Wilson Carey McWilliams

IN Plato's *Laws*, it is an Athenian stranger who teaches that friendship is the standard for the best political society, but modern states, Michael Ignatieff reminds us, are *composed* of strangers. Even smaller states are shaped by the massive impersonalities of international economics and politics. In modern politics, estrangement is the rule. We help and are helped by other citizens, unknown to us, only through the mediation of other strangers, the state officials who interpret and administer the laws. Our civic duties and our due are both radically impersonal, at best a rough justice in which "We are responsible for each other, but we are not responsible to each other."

As Ignatieff indicates, modern political thought scales political speech down to material needs and individual rights because such language sits comfortably with modern politics: it is universal and abstract, requiring no knowledge of persons or their relationships. Yet political speech reduced to that level ignores our needs for collectivity, for dignity, love, and fraternity. Ignatieff's book is a plea to rearticulate those needs, in part so that we may better appreciate the limits and the modest virtues of modern political life.

Modern politics has a tragic dimension which is not the fault of this or that regime but inherent in the thing itself. A modern state may recognize our humanity—humane compassion is probably its highest virtue—but it cannot know us as individuals. The more it advances equality, the more it outrages my dignity; it tells me that I matter as a human being, but not as *myself*. Discussing Augustine and Hume, Ignatieff develops a similar argument in relation to secular freedom: liberal regimes expand our freedom of choice, but this liberation in practice also implies public agnosticism in thought, or at least, an unwillingness to specify the *best* choice. Secular freedom is at odds with moral security, liberation with consolation. And, through an interpretation of *King Lear*, Ignatieff points out that no politics can completely satisfy human need because love, even in the best of regimes, cannot be made into a political or social right.

Yet despite Ignatieff's graceful prose and his fine sympathies, his argument has its own tragic flaw. Ignatieff maintains that "human nature is historical," by which he means that we must separate our *nature*—equated with our biology—from our *humanity*, a "second nature" which results from conventions and institutions of human making. Our specifically human needs are not natural, but the results of "some set of choices about what it means to be human." History, however, restricts the arbitrariness of these choices, establishing a synthesis between biological nature and humanity. "Being human is a second nature which history taught us," and hence, there is no "eternally valid account of what it means to be human."

This decisively modern view, however, makes a hash out of much of Ignatieff's argument. At crucial points, Ignatieff speaks ahistorically, referring to the human condition as such rather than the condition of human beings in this or that time and place. For example, *King Lear* is said to help teach us that "There is no such thing as love of the human race, only the love of this person for that . . ." Or, the Enlightenment "diminished the tragic dimension of human needing" by ignoring "the facts of our situation which no amount of social engineering can hope to change." When Ignatieff speaks most powerfully, it is in the language of what is humanly true and best, and his argument points, if only implicitly, toward a theoretical best politics, wise about human need.

"Our language," Ignatieff writes, "has not caught up with modernity," but much of *The Needs of Strangers* proves that modern practice needs the correction of ancient speech and theory. As Ignatieff observes, the "vision of the classical *polis*" in many ways beckons us "backwards . . . into the future." A modern state is not a *polis*; citizens will not be friends, and our politics is suited to gentle decencies rather than high excellences. Nevertheless, Ignatieff's book reminds us that modern regimes cannot ignore the human need for fraternity and the political need for civic solidarity, just as secular society, while not a church, must make room for the demands of the spirit. We dare *not* let our political language catch up with modernity, lest we forget that modernity is not enough.

The great value of Michael Walzer's *Exodus and Revolution* lies in its evocation of ancient speech. Walzer has a very contemporary purpose in turning to Exodus, but he respects the text on its own terms. There is an anachronism here and there, but Walzer recognizes that the story is designed to teach, and in fact, that it is a story *about* political teaching and learning, intended for "public reading and rereading." He appreciates that in such a text, intended to be timeless, the authors — or the divine Author — could not exert "close control" over meaning but managed, nevertheless, to produce a "coherent narrative" through "literary artfulness." Walzer begins, in other words, with the conviction that Exodus has something important to teach us, not only about our cultural history but about political life.

As a political teaching, Walzer points out, Exodus describes liberation, redemption, and the founding of a better society within the limits of this world. Revolution, consequently, is a turning not a transformation. Egyptian bondage taught Israel the habits of slaves along

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with the yearning for liberty, and it takes the wilderness — the new "school of the soul" — to accustom Israel to law and responsibility, the "bondage of freedom." Exodus suggests that civic freedom is a hard discipline, to be learned only through travail and by force. At the same time, Walzer notes, the text makes clear that desolation and force are not sufficient teachers. Israel is not broken by slavery; it is a stiff-necked people, recalcitrant but with a kind of spiritedness and dignity, resilient in the face of adversity and capable of learning from it. Moreover, Israel has the benefit of a great teacher, Moses, who knows that his successors must be the many and not the few. Exodus, in short, contends that the best society depends on a miracle — the Greeks would have preferred to call it good fortune — a juxtaposition of events and qualities which human prudence cannot produce or guarantee.

Exodus's best regime, the Covenant, presumes a public committed to justice. The promised land, as Walzer indicates, is conditional on the character of the people as well as the land. The "deeper argument" of Exodus is that righteousness, the sense of "positive equality," is more important than material abundance. So long as human beings yearn for mastery and for freedom from restraint, no land flows with milk and honey. The promised land presumes a people capable of restraining its urge to dominion (including, although Walzer does not say so, its urge to dominate nature).

In this sense, of course, a righteous community cannot be fully or finally attained. The Decalogue commands a kind of soul as well as a kind of action, and we cannot eradicate our self-centeredness or our envy: "I had not known sin, except the Law said, 'Thou shalt not covet.' " The promised land, as Walzer observes, is forever a standard to be striven for and approximated, but never securely possessed.

Walzer sets Exodus against the prophetic vision of a transformed world, a "new earth" in which the promise would be achieved in a new and exalted form. In this sense, Exodus is part of the tradition of ancient utopianism, which presumed that the best state must be *possible* — even if wildly improbable — within the world as we know it. Modern utopianism, on the other hand, presumes the mastery or overcoming of nature, the conquest of necessity by freedom. Good social democrat that he is, Walzer hates modern political messianism, and he uses Exodus to carry on his old quarrel with Leninist totalitarianism. It is for that reason that Walzer is sometimes inclined to read the apocalyptic tradition as a kind of transition from Exodus toward modern utopianism. But, as Walzer knows, the

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THE BOOK OF SORROWS

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prophets presumed that the new earth must be wrought by God, and that its promise reflects God's love, not human achievement. Modern messianism fuses the activism of Exodus with the apocalyptic vision through its belief in the power of science to make, rather than wait for, the new earth.

Modern utopianism, as both Ignatieff and Walzer remind us, is a failed creed, its wreckage all around us and in our lives. And Walzer's splendid *Exodus and Revolution* helps indicate the continuing vitality of the ancient conviction that politics within the limits of nature has its own dignity and glory.

Beyond the pain & struggle, hope

MIDWIVES OF THE FUTURE
AMERICAN SISTERS
TELL THEIR STORY

Edited by Ann Patrick Ware
Leaven Press, $8.95, 237 pp.

Margaret Susan Thompson

DURING the 1950s, thousands of girls who would later become sisters — and, no doubt, more who would not — pored over the carefully enticing pictures and text of *Bernie Becomes a Nun*. Bernie was a "normal" Brooklyn teenager whose saga began happily at home, continued through a presumably typical postulancy and novitiate, and ended with her leaving eagerly for South America in the full habit of a professed Maryknoller. Well, despite a 40 percent decline in the number of women religious since 1965, Bernie *stayed* a nun (now in a Peruvian House of Prayer), as did the nineteen women whose essays appear in *Midwives of the Future*. And as they recount their experiences in community before, during, and after the tumultuous renewal impelled by Vatican II, we come to understand why and how they did so.

None of the authors here has had an easy or complacent life. Several have left their original congregations to join (or found) others; a few have confronted — and overcome — traumatic crises of vocation and belief. As leaders of their orders, or as pioneers in controversial ministries, some have had difficult dealings with bishops, Roman officials, and their own sisters; four of the writers, and editor Ann Patrick Ware, were signers of the controversial October 1984 "Statement on Pluralism and Abortion" that led to Vatican threats of dismissal.

And yet . . . despite the pain and the struggle reflected in these narratives, the principal message they convey is of hope and joy. After anywhere from twenty to fifty years of religious life, these women are engaged and alive: grateful for the growth they have experienced and eager for more. Although none is employed in what used to be regarded as typical "nuns' work," these sisters all see themselves as "living the Gospel" more fully than they found possible in pre-renewal days — as apostles to prisons; advocates for the poor, minorities, women, or homosexuals; political activists; professors; facilitators of East-West spiritual dialogue. Their faith finds purpose in challenge and change. Released from the constraining rigidity of the conventual worlds they had eagerly entered initially, they revel in the potential of diversity and risk.

This is hardly, of course, a random collection of autobiographies; *Midwives* is an anthology with a mission. Concern over what are perceived and labeled as reactionary initiatives now emanating from Rome — especially the forced resignations of Agnes Mary Mansour and others from political office, the 1983 Vatican directive on "Essential Elements of Religious Life," and the investigation of American orders currently underway — permeates both Ware's introduction and most of the pieces that follow. It is quite evident that these sisters will resist those and any other attempts to close the windows that were opened two decades ago, and that this book is intended as testimony and justification of their position.

The message is clear and persuasive — so far, at least, as the twenty women here are concerned. Still, two important questions remain unaddressed and un-

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answered. First, in spite of the fulfillment these nuns have experienced, why did over 60,000 others leave communities during the very years of the authors' adaptation and growth, and why are so few candidates entering to replace them? Second, and perhaps more crucial, the reader may be left uncertain as to the typicality of these accounts. The writer of nearly every essay is a well-known and recognized member of Catholicism's progressive feminist vanguard. The almost uniform prominence of this anthology's contributors could allow it to be dismissed as aberrant or unrepresentative by those critical of what it has to say. Such a response would be unfortunate, for surveys and other data suggest that the majority of American sisters today espouse views similar to those presented here. Had this point been made explicitly, perhaps through an essay by social scientist Sister Marie Augusta Neal who has conducted much of the relevant research, *Midwives* might be less vulnerable to that sort of criticism.

All Catholics, including those in Rome, need to recognize that the renewal which produced the changes celebrated in this volume — the same phenomena apparently so disturbing to those currently in the Curia — was implemented in direct compliance with papal directives, particularly *Perfectae Caritatis*, that ordered communities to explore and recapture their founders' charisms. The excitement and liberation which that process generated is an implicit subtext to nearly every essay, and is dealt with specifically in those by Joan Chittister Margaret Traxler and, particularly, Sister of St. Joseph of Peace, Dorothy Vidulich. Vidulich's account of the reclamation of her institute's much-maligned founder, Margaret Anna Cusack, is a pointed reminder that innovation is by definition revolutionary, that late-twentieth-century nuns are descendants of risk-taking pioneers who were able to perceive unmet needs in their own day and to respond to them by doing what had not been done before. What this suggests, of course, is that however upset those in Rome may be, events of the past twenty years were born from the very sort of obedience to Vatican edicts that John Paul II so earnestly desires — and thus are quite literally, if perhaps unexpectedly, traditional. Seen in such a light, *Midwives of the Future* is a provocative, illuminating, and often moving witness to history in process.

Approaching the end

IN CUSTODY

Anita Desai

Bessie/Harper & Row, $16.95, 204 pp.

Paul Marx

RICHLY embellished with vocabulary and locutions from Persian and Arabic, Urdu has been the language of Indian Moslems. Over several centuries a considerable Urdu literature has developed. With partition in 1947, Urdu became the official language of Moslem Pakistan. As the influence of the Moslem remnant in India declines, Urdu has reached the endangered point there. Urdu — "language of the court in days of royalty — now languishes in the back lanes and gutters of the city. No place for it to live in the style to which it is accustomed, no emperors and nawabs to act as its patrons."

Anita Desai's novel is about an attempt to keep alive the tradition of Urdu literature through a special issue of a Delhi literary magazine. However, the foolishness with which Desai afflicts her characters makes it impossible for the special issue to be published as planned. The fact that Desai has made her scholar, Deven, and her editor, Murad, such futile, laughable creatures suggests that as far as she is concerned Urdu literature is just about dead.

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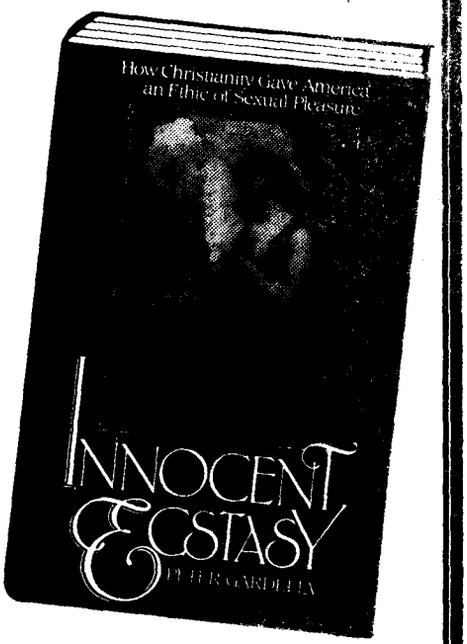

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Like Isaac Bashevis Singer with Yiddish, the fictional poet Nur continues to create in a language that is being done in by history. It is Deven's assignment from old classmate Murad to bus into Delhi from his college town and find the great Nur — interview him about the Urdu scene and get from him whatever new work he might have. Unfortunately, the aged Nur is immured in a foul, ramshackle Moslem quarter. He is amenable to talking and reciting, but the chaos amidst which he lives constantly intrudes.

Deven, a Hindu, must penetrate that Moslem chaos. Surely, trying to save Urdu is not an unworthy cause, but Deven and Murad and Nur himself are made to be unworthy of the cause. Murad is devious, entirely self-serving, a friend only by association. And in Deven, Desai has given us — what word could better describe him? — a wimp. Timid, indecisive, threatened by every raised voice, he nevertheless has made it to the post of lecturer in a small college. But given the opportunity to resurrect Nur and thereby advance his career, he ends up worse off than he began.

Yet what might be expected of a teacher who cannot even make eye contact with the students sitting before him? Rather than look at them, he feels forced to "look away quickly and focus his eyes upon the door at the far end of the room. . . . He had for years been practicing this trick of ignoring his class and speaking to himself, or someone outside, invisible. That was what made him a boring teacher who could not command the attention, let alone win the regard of his unruly class." Our protagonist is a little man, an anti-hero, a wimp. But, as sometimes is the case, the little man has a passion: he is a true lover of Urdu poetry.

Whatever ironic fantasy one might try to evoke about the waning years of a great writer, it is unlikely that the degradation Desai produces for Deven's hero Nur could be surpassed. Earlier in life, Nur had indeed been a powerful poet, but as the end approaches he is made to be a glutton, to crawl in his own vomit, to live in fear of the young prostitute whom he has taken as a wife, who berates him for being "a tortoise that sticks its head in the mud at the bottom of the pond." It is part of Desai's technique to give all developments still another twist; nothing is as bad as it seems, it's worse. And so when we are shocked to see the last great Urdu poet living under the tyranny of the prostitute, we are led further; we hear the prostitute assert that as an Urdu poet herself, she is greater than Nur.

Deven had allotted three days for his interviews with Nur. But almost all Nur's waking time is spent in the presence of hangers-on from the bazaar, and he plays to his low-life audience. He discourses about food and drink. Occasionally he is moved to recite a few lines of his poetry. More of the poetry, though, is Keats's and Shelley's. The three days turn into weeks. The undertaking costs Deven all his money — and much more. When it is all brought to an end, and Deven finally has hours and hours of bluster and impertinence edited down to one tape, it is so noisy and such a hodgepodge as to be useless. He is close to jumping into a canal. But back in Delhi, Nur and his young wife look upon him as their benefactor. Nur, fearful for his soul, wants Deven to underwrite a trip to Mecca.

The brazen young wife wants Deven to sponsor her poetry. In a letter, which provides perhaps the most comical passage in a very comical book, Imtiaz tells Deven he must overcome his hostility towards women, which after all is just a way of avoiding having to admit that his supposed superiority is questionable. "Are you not guilty of assuming that because you are a male, you have a right to brains, talent, reputation, and achievement, while I because I was born female, am condemned to find what satisfaction I can in being maligned, mocked, ignored, and neglected? Is it not you who has made me play the role of the loose woman in gaudy garments by refusing to take my work seriously and giving me just that much regard that you would extend to even a failure in the arts as long as the artist was male? In this unfair world that you have created what else could I have been but what I am?"

Poor Deven! Poor everybody! For every character in this novel is satirized. The American reader finds himself in the uncomfortable situation of laughing at them all and feeling superior. Yet that is the way we react to Thurber and our own satirists, isn't it? Still, if Urdu speakers and Indians should be vexed with what Desai has done here, that reaction would make a lot of sense.

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Correspondence

(Continued from page 354)

"substantial refund" amounted to $84,000, or 12 percent of the overcharge, which weighed in at an impressive 618 percent of what "an ordinarily prudent person in the conduct of competitive business" might pay for the kit. In this and other instances, Mr. Weinberger owes us "a more complete picture of military spending" than experience has taught us to expect from the Pentagon.

I am tempted to quote Shaw back at General Winters ("I never expect a soldier to think," and "When the military man approaches, the world locks up its spoons . . ." spring to mind), but I doubt the wisdom of generalizing on the authority of a man who embraced socialism, but eschewed sex.

Besides, I intend to accept General Winters's job offer; as soon as we settle on the money and he tells me which door to report to, I'll pack up my current tool and supply catalogs, and come on down.

ROBERT O. RICHARDSON

The chief's service

Washington, D.C.

To the Editors: Thomas E. Quigley's article ["When Research Masquerades," April 5] makes some good points, but perhaps misses the main point. Even the Great Communicator needs the help of his White House staff, and Faith Whittlesey has performed an important public service.

The Office of Public Liaison is not and indeed should not be a "balanced" academic effort. It should clarify and advocate the president's position — always, of course, strictly adhering to the facts and the rules of evidence. Further, in the climate of opinion created by mainline church and prestige-media spokesmen — which tends to oppose U.S. policy in Central America — it is important that leadership groups be given an opportunity to hear the president's case.

People who are exposed to a broad spectrum of fact and opinion about Central America may not see things exactly the way the White House does. But given the Soviet and Cuban military presence and subversive activities in the Caribbean Basin, they will be much more likely to recognize that the president has a more persuasive position than Mr. Quigley is willing to allow.

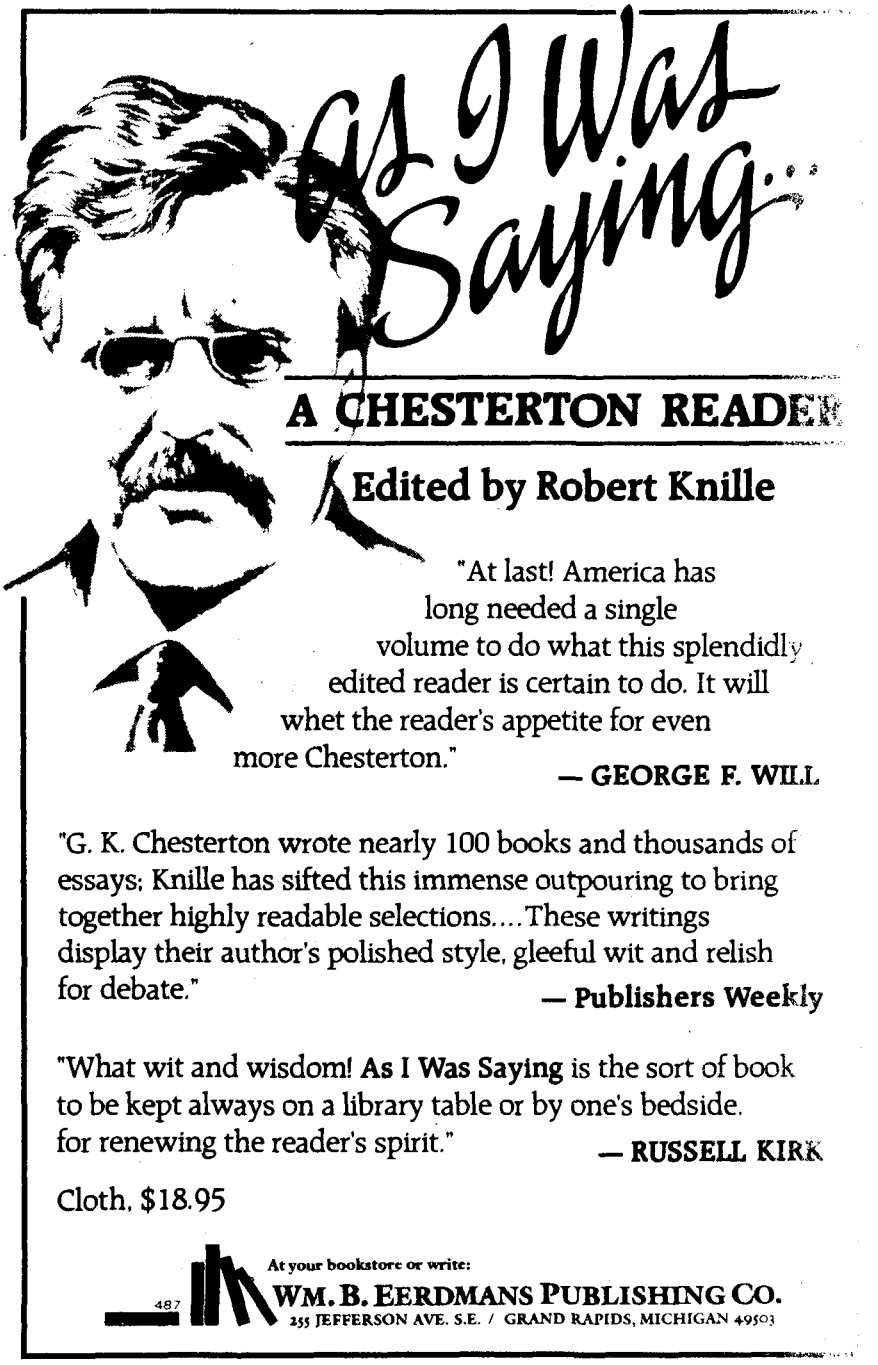
Since Mr. Quigley mentions in passing our anthology, *Crisis and Opportunity: U.S. Policy in Central America and the Caribbean,* I would like to make clear that the book does not engage in the selective quotation he decries. We included Ronald Reagan, but also Fidel Castro; the article by Kerry Ptacek [illegible] also the U.S. Catholic Conference's [illegible] timony before Congress.

ERNEST W. L[illegible]

The author replies

Is the suggestion that the administration has inadequate access to the media [illegible] is thus justified in distorting sensitive and important matters? I find neither proposition sustainable, but perhaps I'm still missing main points.

THOMAS E. QUIGLEY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